DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 787	SO 018 546

TITLE	The Constitution's Children: A Collection of Essays by Schoolchildren to Commemorate the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, 1787-1987.
INSTITUTION	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	IS-87-118
PUB DATE	17 Sep 87
NOTE	204p.; Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Civil Liberties; Civil Rights; Elementary Education; *Social Studies; Student Projects; Student Publications; Writing (Composition); Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Bicentennial; Commemorative Publications; *United States Constitution

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this nationwide writing project is to encourage the teaching of rights and responsibilities under the United States Constitution to elementary school students. The project also provides an opportunity to improve writing skills. The book includes 150 essays chosen from 1,350 finalists. Every school in the nation was invited to join in the competition. Essays were judged for understanding of topic, clarity of expression, unity of ideas, originality, and proper style and mechanics. In their essays, the children envisioned the Constitution in diverse ways. For some, it was like an oak tree; for others, it was a golden thread, an open door, or a firm foundation. Children who belonged to groups that have sometimes been mistreated and disenfranchised saluted the Constitution for protecting them from the misfortunes that befell their ancestors. A listing of the finalists by state is included. (SM)

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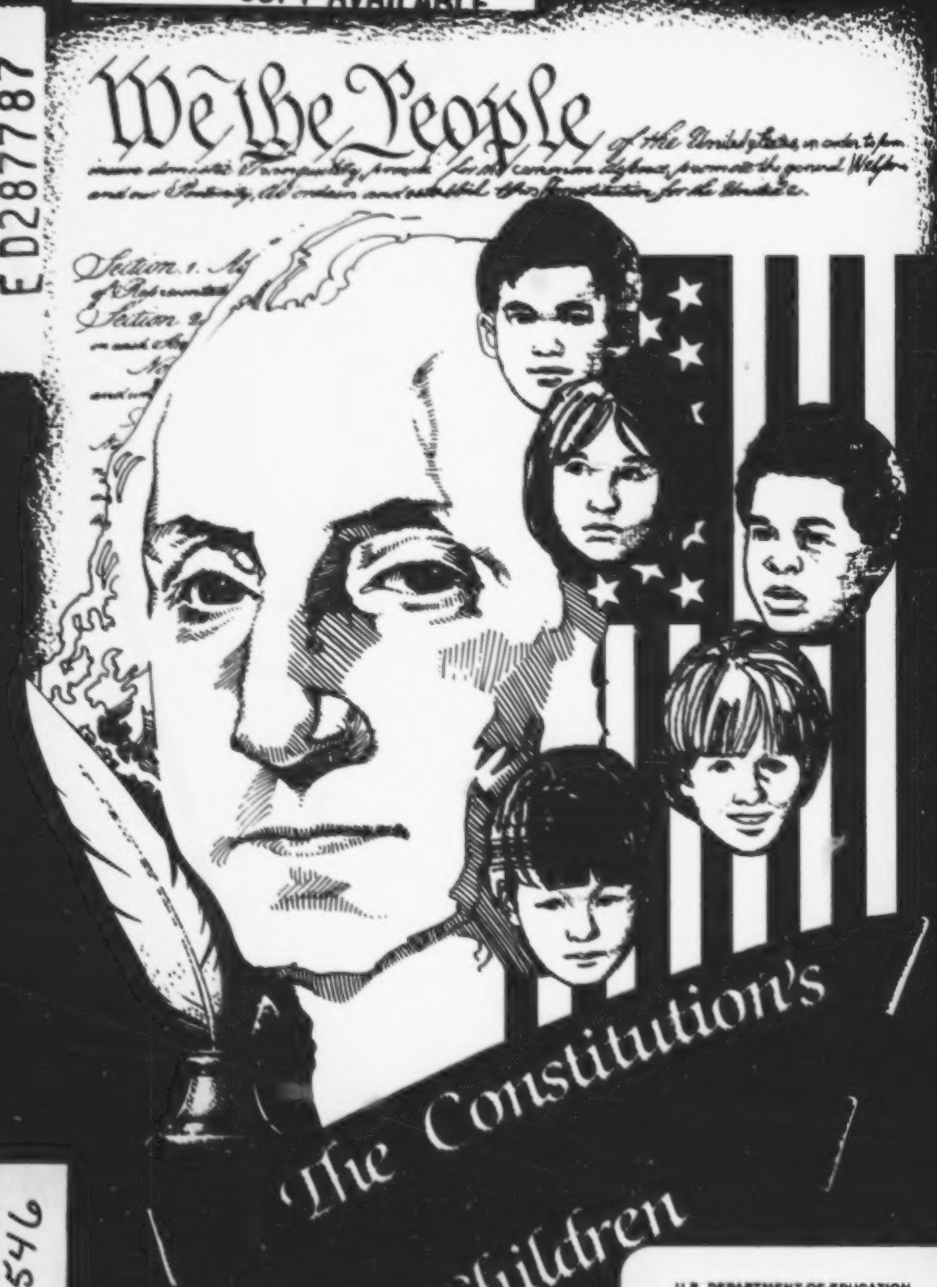
We the People of the United States, in order to form
insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare
and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United S
Section. 1.
Section. 2.

The Constitution's Children

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The Constitution's Children

A Collection of Essays by Schoolchildren to Commemorate the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution 1787-1987

U.S. Department of Education
September 17, 1987

Greeting

President Ronald Reagan

Through two centuries now, our Constitution has proven a source of strength, stability, and unerring wisdom, serving longer than any other written constitution in the world. Think of that: Young as our country is, we're really the oldest republic in the world.

The Constitution plays a part in guiding each of your lives. You see, when the Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia to draft that document, they were thinking of the future. They were thinking of the kind of country they wanted to leave for their children and their children's children. They wanted their sons and daughters to grow up in a land that was safe for people of all religious faiths, a land where they would all be free to speak their minds and shape their own lives, a land where all would be free.

We are all heirs to the Constitution; we're all the Constitution's children. Being the heirs to the Constitution is our good fortune, but it also places upon us a responsibility: the responsibility to nurture and defend this country so that, when our turn comes, we, too, can pass on to our children a nation of greatness and freedom. Maybe that's the most important part of all you've learned in studying and writing about the Constitution. You have taken the first step toward shouldering your responsibilities as citizens of our country, the country that you will one day lead.

So, congratulations to all of you once again. And God bless you.

Remarks to the Authors
Rose Garden, The White House June 1, 1987

Message

Warren E. Burger

Chairman, Commission on the Bicentennial
of the United States Constitution
Chief Justice of the United States, 1969–1986

I have long believed that discussions of the Constitution should not be limited just to lawyers, since the Constitution is for all of the people. After all, the Constitution's Preamble begins with the words, "WE THE PEOPLE."

During this Bicentennial celebration, we especially hope to stimulate the young. The 150 pieces in this volume demonstrate that children of all ages can understand the underlying purposes of the Constitution.

Some of these children have exhibited a profound understanding of the function of the Constitution in American society. Witness the following from a first-grader whose piece is included in this volume:

> The Constitution is like a stop sign in the road. The stop sign stops you from bumping other people's cars. This lets everyone drive down the road without getting hurt. The Constitution stops you from bumping into other people's freedoms. This lets everyone live without hurting other people's rights.

I hope all of us will learn much from what these young people have written about the Constitution. The future of our Constitution rests in their hands.

Foreword

The great British statesman, William Gladstone, called our Constitution "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." Subsequent history has proven him right. No political document has laid a more successful foundation for government. None has lasted longer, and none has been more widely imitated. Today, when the average nation has had two constitutions since 1945, ours has lasted 200 years.

The secret of our Constitution's success lies not just in the wisdom of our Fathers, but also in the love of freedom harbored by each successive generation of Americans. Ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As the great Chief Justice, John Marshall, observed, "The people made the Constitution and...can unmake it. It is...their own will, and lives only by their will." The Constitution is our protection, but *we* are its protectors. As the beneficiaries and guarantors of the rights the Constitution ensures, we must carry the words of this great document in our minds and cherish them in our hearts.

The Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution offers all Americans the occasion to reacquaint themselves with the provisions of this foundational work. It also gives the youth of America the opportunity to learn how our Republic was formed.

This knowledge is crucial for all our citizens, but especially for the young, because they are the future guardians of the American way of life.

Our children's knowledge of the Constitution and a love of its principles are our surest defense of the rights it guarantees. We at the Department of Education sought to foster this knowledge and love by sponsoring the project that resulted in this book. The essays herein represent the best among more than a million written by children in grades 1–8 throughout the country.

These essays show that even first-graders can appreciate some of the freedoms the Constitution gives. More importantly, by learning about these freedoms, children understand their place in the long line of Americans who have benefitted from and sacrificed for their country. Our children need to realize, as Joey Beauchamp from Kansas City writes, that even "a first grade boy like me is important to my country." By telling our youngsters about their rights and responsibilities, we help them grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. We encourage them to realize that there is something more important than self-interest and something more worthy of devotion than self-gratification.

Surely, the role of parents, educators, and good citizens is to discharge our own duties admirably and to encourage our children to grow in wisdom and virtue. *The Constitution's Children* is a step in that direction and one that we at the Department of Education are proud to have sponsored.

The success of this project is due in large measure to Deputy Under Secretary Peter R. Greer who, with his staff, especially Ted Sharp and Linda Rusthoven, worked long and hard to bring it to fruition. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, and his staff (acknowledged in the back of this book) ably supervised the publication process.

We also appreciate the efforts of the many individuals and organizations that collaborated with us to make this project work. We are grateful to the principals and teachers who encouraged their students to participate; to the staff of the *Weekly Reader,* a magazine for schoolchildren, which advertised our project and featured material on the Constitution; and those from State Education Agencies and the Council for American Private Education who selected the essays considered by our national selection panel. I am especially grateful to the panelists who read and evaluated the final 1,350 entries: Alan Fraker, Daniel Merenda, Wladyslaw Pleszczynski, Jhoon Rhee, Richard Rodriguez, June Scobee, Melanie Sperling, Vicki Stenger, and Miriam Remar, the panel's director.

In working to make this book possible, all these people have demonstrated their belief in the importance of the Constitution and its central role in our children's education as citizens. They have shown that the Constitution has not only many children, but also many devoted supporters.

William J. Bennett
Secretary of Education

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When you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with these men, all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching as near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies... Thus I consent, Sir, to the Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.

Benjamin Franklin
Federal Convention
September 17, 1787

Introduction

When the 38 signers of the Constitution met in the steamy Philadelphia summer of 1787, many of them doubted that the governmental system they had conjured in ink would survive in practice.

Hope and trepidation hung in the air. Benjamin Franklin, at 81, the senior statesman at the convention, expressed both sentiments. After all the debates had ended and the delegates moved toward the silver inkstand, Franklin mused whether the half sun painted on the back of the convention president's chair symbolized a sunrise or sunset. "Now," he exclaimed, "I know that it is a rising, not a setting sun." But Franklin was also a practical statesman. When a woman in the street asked him what kind of government the delegates had devised, he replied, "A Republic, Madam – if you can keep it!"

Today we celebrate having kept our Republic for two hundred years. But, like Franklin, we recognize that the Republic does not sustain itself. The responsibility of keeping it belongs to all of us.

We cannot fulfill this responsibility unless our citizens are both knowledgeable and vigilant. With this in mind, we at the Department of Education decided to sponsor an educational project on "What the CONSTITUTION Means to Me and to Our Country" for schoolchildren in grades one through eight.

We hoped to offer youngsters an opportunity to learn more about America's early history, the principles on which she was founded, and the Constitution itself. We also believed that it would give our children a chance to practice their writing skills.

The letter we sent to principals of every school in the nation emphasized the importance of teaching youngsters about the Constitution and including civic studies in the curriculum. We felt it was urgent that young people participate in projects like this one, particularly because recent surveys have revealed how little Americans know about this document. We thought acquainting our children with the Constitution would not only fill their minds, but also open their eyes.

Aaron Turnbow, a sixth-grader from Knoxville, Tennessee, initially thought that "Writing this essay sounded like a very boring assignment because I did not think the Constitution meant anything to me." He quickly discovered its value, however, when he realized that it protected his right to assemble for Scouts, 4-H, and basketball games. Corey Rosen, an eighth-grader from Honolulu, had a similar experience. "Prior to tonight," he wrote, "I had never read the Constitution. As I read, I thought for the first time about all the ways it affects my life."

This kind of awakening is what every American child should experience. In social studies classes where this is not happening, children are being deprived of a crucial part of their heritage.

More than 1.5 million girls and boys from across the nation participated in this educational project. State Education Agencies selected essays from public school children, while the Council for American Private Eduation (CAPE) selected from among the entries written by youngsters enrolled in private schools. The Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Department of Defense's Dependents Schools (DODDS), and the Department of State's schools for Americans abroad all participated in this program. Lest the work of very young children be evaluated alongside that of boys and girls twice their age, entries were clustered into four groups: grades 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and 7 and 8.

The 1,350 entries that reached the "finals" in Washington were judged for: understanding of the topic; clarity of expression; unity of ideas; originality; and proper style and mechanics. A committee of distinguished citizens (named in the foreword) selected the 150 essays that appear in this book. The boys and girls who wrote them were invited to Washington where they received an award from Secretary Bennett and were honored by President Reagan in the Rose Garden at the White House.

In their essays, the children envisioned the Constitution in diverse ways. For some, it was like an oak tree; for others, a golden thread, an open door, a firm foundation, even a beautiful lady.

Some children, like Melissa Huebler of Astoria, New York, emphasized the Constitution's protective aspect. "It watches over you so you don't get hurt," she wrote. Sophora Keo, a second-grader who escaped with her family from Cambodia adds: "The Constitution holds me tight and says I don't have to be afraid anymore." Children who fled, or whose parents fled, from Afghanistan, Cuba, Poland, Vietnam–from wherever liberty is suppressed–hailed America as the land of freedom and opportunity.

Americans who belong to groups that have sometimes been mistreated and disenfranchised saluted the Constitution for protecting them from the misfortunes that befell their ancestors. Raphelia Begaye, a Navaho girl from Thoreau, New Mexico, wrote, "The Constitution . . . protects the many different cultures of this nation [which] is very important to me since I am a Native American." For Louis Bernstein, constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion are particularly important: "The Constitution has a special personal meaning to me because I'm Jewish," and many countries do not let Jews "practice their religion," but, "In America we're free to . . .

practice Judaism." Katherine Davis, a black third-grader from Institute, West Virginia, wrote that "The U.S. Constitution means . . . I don't have to drink from a separate water fountain that says, 'Colored,' and that I won't have to work for people that want me as a slave."

The Constitution's children realized that this document not only protects them from harm but also encourages them to exercise their rights. For Troy Stein from Louisville, Kentucky, this means he has "the freedom to go to college and get an education and play pro basketball for a team like the Los Angeles Lakers." For Jamie Gibson of Orlando, Florida, it means the more prosaic "right to be treated fairly in . . . school and be told of our progress."

Perhaps Kelly M. Rodko summed up best what the Constitution means—cutting across lines of race, religion, sex, and ethnic origin. The " 'right to be me,' " she observes, "is the most important right given to me in the Constitution." This is especially important, she claims, because in giving each individual the right to be him or herself, "The Constitution gives all the people . . . the right to be themselves, that is 'the right to be us.' "

We at the Department of Education feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to sponsor this project, to have read these essays, and to have encouraged so many young Americans to think more deeply about their civic rights and responsibilities. All of us are proud to present *The Constitution's Children* to you.

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
Assistant Secretary and Counselor
to the Secretary

America is lucky . . .

GRADES 1 & 2

Cory Robin Ando Grade: 1
Kaufman Primary School Teacher: Dorothy Kerr
Kaufman, Texas

Today my mom and I went shopping at Ben Franklin, and I got to pick out a new toy. Mom told me I was really lucky! She said, "There are places where children don't get to do this. They are told what to eat, and if they can go to school." This made me wonder, "Why am I so lucky?"

We started talking about my freedoms and how I had the freedom of choice. This was given to me because people long ago wrote an important paper called the Constitution. I know it is old and must be really important, kind of like a Bible for citizens of America.

I really cannot understand all of the fancy words that it talks about. But I know we need to follow the laws. My Pa is a lawyer, and he says that's what he works on each day, freedom of choice for all people.

Americans are really lucky! I know I want to follow the laws and obey them. They give us the hope that we can get new things to be proud of. I'm sad that everyone can't have a constitution so they can choose, too.

Allison Lynn Armstrong
M.M. Pierce Elementary School
Remington, Virginia

Grade: 2
Teacher: Audrey T. Jones

What the Constitution means to me and my country is that we have a president who is our leader instead of a king. We get to vote for our leaders so we can have a say in how to run our country. We can go to any church we want to. We have the right to ask the government to change laws we think are unfair. We have our privacy and we have the right to speak and write our ideas even if the government disagrees with us. I Love AMERICA!

The people seem to have laid aside monarchial and taken up the republican government with as much ease as would have attended their throwing off an old and putting on a new suit of clothes.

Thomas Jefferson

Kristy Baskerville
Richmondville Central School
Richmondville, New York

Grade: 2
Teacher: Joan Brooker
Karen Prozzo

The CONSTITUTION is important to me because it is fair rules for our country. The CONSTITUTION protects our country's rights. It means that all people have freedom no matter what color they are and no matter where they live in the United States. It doesn't matter if they are rich or poor.

Some people born in the United States don't even think about the CONSTITUTION and how important it is. They don't realize how much freedom they have. People from other countries come to the United States because they want the freedom we have.

Without the CONSTITUTION we would not have rights and freedom. A lot of people would get hurt because there would be no rules.

The CONSTITUTION is what makes our country great!

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Joey Beauchamp Grade: 1
Chinn Elementary School Teacher: Elvera Bartels
Kansas City, Missouri

What the United States Constitution means to me is that a first grade boy like me is important to my country.

Two hundred years ago some men made rules to protect my country and me so no one would conquer us and people would be happy. They needed laws to help the first states work together to be one, strong country.

The Constitution is fair for everyone. Our laws are made by people we vote for to represent us. We vote for our own President. We have judges to decide what to do with people who break the laws. They have a trial before they can be put in prison.

The Constitution says my country can't tell me how to think. I am free to think for myself. It says police can't get into my house to look for things without special permission. Newspapers and television newsmen have to tell the truth about what happens. I can go to the church I choose.

I'm glad George Washington and the other men cared enough to write the Constitution for our new country. Now I know why he is called "Father of our Country."

After the war, states couldn't get along together. The Constitution made them all into one family. Everyone could have a say: the little ones as well as the big ones.

The Constitution has lasted for 200 years because it is good. Other countries have copied it. I think it will still be best even after 200 more years.

Jonathan Bufkin
Gilbert High School
Gilbert, Louisiana

Grade: 2
Teacher: Laura Batey

The U.S. Constitution is a piece of paper that was written by the founders of our country. It gives us freedom to do many things. I love it because without it we may be like Russia. We would not get to say what we wanted to or do what we wanted to. Our Constitution lets us do anything as long as we don't hurt anyone else.

I love the Constitution because we are given the right to bear arms. I want to be in the Air Force and fight for my country. I am very proud of my Constitution.

God grants liberty only to those who love it and are always ready to guard and defend it.

Daniel Webster

Laura Butler
Saint Agnes Academy
Memphis, Tennessee

Grade: 2
Teacher: Julie Knudson

No other country has a constitution like ours. Without the Constitution our country wouldn't have fair laws for all people. We can change laws that are unfair. I think the Constitution means we have a lot of freedom. I can think and say what I want. I can go to church when I want and where I want. I will be able to grow up and be whatever I want. Everyone can come and go as they please. We can do what we want. We can all live together in peace. I think it is very important for our country to have freedom, and I hope it will mean the same for the next generations to come.

Sara Casica	Grade: 2
Saints Peter and Paul School	Teacher: Sister Mary Consuela Haremski
Chicago, Illinois	

The U.S. Constitution is a great document. It tells me what our government can do. All of our states work together so we can enjoy a safe, healthy, and happy life. We try to promote peace in our country and other countries, too. We can be free in our speech. We can worship God as we wish. We can choose where we want to go to school. So, I am happy to live in this land because it has a super guide and guardian of our rights–the U.S. Constitution.

. . . it appears as if it was the design of Providence, that . . . a band of brethren . . . should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties . . . As a nation we have vanquished our common enemies: as a nation we have formed alliances and made treaties, and entered into various compacts and conventions with foreign States.

John Jay, the *Federalist*

Aedan Patrick Cleary Grade: 2
St. Brendan School Teacher: Sister Juana
New Haven, Connecticut Olmedo

The Constitution means to me that I and my Country have freedom. We are free to go to any church we want. We are free to go on a bike ride. We are free to own houses and cars. We are free to go to a school of our choice. We are free to go to visit our relatives. We are free to go to different states and look around. The Constitution means respect and protection. We respect our country because God gave it to us. We should respect people, too. We should respect our property and the property of others.

The Constitution means that I and all the other people have equal rights. Women and men can vote. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter if you are yellow, black or white. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor. We all have the same rights. Men and woman can ride a boat. Black people have the right to ride boats, too. People have the right to have an education. We have the right to stand up for our rights.

The Constitution means that I and my Country can explore the world. People can build rocket ships and go to planets. They can build big telescopes, and do whatever they want.

I am proud to be an American and to have a Constitution that has lasted 200 years. Happy Birthday Constitution!! God Bless America!!!

Courtney Domenico
Villa Victoria Academy
West Trenton,
New Jersey

Grade: 1
Teacher: Bernadine Medwick
Sister Mary Lou Shulas

In my family, Mommy and Daddy make the rules. The United States is like a giant family with lots of different Mommies and Daddies. The Constitution was made so everybody had the same rules to follow. It says we can always say what we think is right. When I get older the rules in my family will change but we will always be able to talk about our problems. The United States gets older, too. The Constitution says we can set up meetings to change the rules if we need to make things better, just like in a real big family. When I think about that, it makes me happy to live in America.

Lisa Fowle
Anton Martin Slomsek Sacred Heart Elementary School
Etiwanda, California

Grade: 2
Teacher: Anthony Reymann

I think America is lucky because other countries have unfair laws. For example, East Germany has a wall around it, so if someone tries to get out, the police will put him in jail. In Iran, the ladies' clothes have to cover them completely except for their hands and eyes. The Soviet Union's government tells you what job you'll have to do, whether you like it or not. Those are some of the things that are not fair.

People from all over the world want to come and live in the United States because in America, people are free. We have freedom to wear any style clothes, go anywhere to visit or to move there, and we can pick our own job. We can do these things because of the Constitution. We are able to say anything we think is wrong and vote on it. We have judges and courts. Some other places don't. In those places, if someone makes up a lie and says, "He took my money," the police can take that person and put him in jail. They don't even look for proof like fingerprints. We can also go to any church we choose.

I feel happy about our freedom. The United States is the fairest country I know of. We can do almost anything, if it's legal. We can vote for our own leaders and the people who lose do not get mad like in some countries and start to fight. Americans understand that there is a better way.

I am glad I live in America!

Kelli Giddish
Big Creek Elementary School
Cumming, Georgia

Grade: 1
Teacher: Sheila Shepard

The Constitution is a set of rules for our country. It was written 200 years ago. The Constitution means that we can go to the church we want to or not go at all. It means that we can go to a school. It means that we can say what we want.

For me, it means that I can go to church with my grandmother. It means I can go to Big Creek and learn a lot. It means that I can speak for myself when I agree and when I do not agree. I love my country.

James Griffis
Florence Elementary School
Florence, Texas

Grade: 2
Teacher: Penny Bowden

The 55 men who met in Philadelphia in 1787 can be proud of their work. They created a new form of government and defined its powers.

When the Constitution was written, the people of the United States traveled by horse and buggy. Now we travel in space and men have walked on the moon. Although there have been many great changes in this country since 1787 there have been very few changes in the Constitution.

Our Founding Fathers signed five sheets of paper that protect the freedom of each person and have lasted for 200 years.

After the lapse of six thousand years since the creation of the world, America now presents the first instance of a people assembled to weigh deliberately and calmly and to decide leisurely and peaceably upon the form of government by which they will bind themselves and their posterity.

James Wilson, 1787

Justin Guzzino
Kenwood Elementary School
Hammond, Indiana

Grade: 1
Teacher: Kay Dell Johnson

The Constitution is laws made for all of us. It gives us a way to be united as a whole country instead of just what is best for each state. It means that no one will ever be a slave again or can own another person. It gives me freedom to believe in God and when I grow up, it will give me the right to vote like my mom and dad. I'm glad we have a constitution because it means justice and fairness for me and for all the people in my country.

> *. . . we may define a republic to be . . . a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behavior.*
>
> James Madison, the *Federalist*

Scott Edward Hegyes
Holy Trinity Catholic School
Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania

Grade: 2
Teacher: Mary Ellen Forsyth

I cannot really say how much better it is to live in America because I am only 7 years old and have never left the country. From what I have seen and heard on television and what Mommy and Daddy are always telling us about our "rights and freedoms," I think I'm really lucky to have been born in the United States. I can say and do just about anything I want, love God and pray to Him when I want and be whatever I want to be and not be afraid of going to jail or being shot because of my ideas.

Even though I don't really understand all about these "rights and freedoms" now, I'm sure it must be good for me because it seems that a lot of people from other countries keep trying to come to America to live. If the United States wasn't such a great place, people would not leave their families and give up their homes to come here. America, I think I love you.

Jessica Johnson
Gadsden Christian Academy
Havana, Florida

Grade: 2
Teacher: Mary Joe Esry

The Constitution is the set of basic laws of which our government is founded. It was written by representatives from the original colonies. These representatives acted on behalf of all the people living in the colonies. They wanted better laws, peace, and order within our nation. They wanted our nation to be strong against foreign enemies and for all people to be free. The Constitution provides certain liberties for us as individuals that no one can take away from us. Some of these are freedoms of speech, religion, press, assembly, and the right to petition the government The Constitution guarantees these rights to all people.

The Constitution has divided the government into three parts, the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. These branches see that the laws are carried out fairly. Under the Constitution the people rule the government, the government doesn't rule the people. This rule by the people is what makes our country so strong. We the people are able to add to or change the Constitution as necessary. Our Constitution has been in continuous use longer than any other written constitution in the world. Because of our Constitution and the rule of our people, this country is one of the strongest nations in the world. We as a people and a great country have stood together this long because of our Constitution and the willingness of the people to work together. What the Constitution really means to me could be summed up in this one word: "Freedom."

Christos Katsiaouni
Lincoln International School
Kampala, Uganda

Grade: 2
Teacher: Elsa Almeida

The American Constitution is a very important document. The American Constitution was written 200 years ago. It was written so every person had freedom and rights in America. It says how the country should be governed and how laws should be made. It also gave people courts to protect their rights. Even after 200 years it is still used.

I am not American but if I should ever go there to live, I know I would be treated fairly because of the Constitution.

Meghan Kell Grade: 2
College Gate School Teacher: Sarah Jenkins
Anchorage, Alaska

The important thing about the Constitution is that it gives us many rights. One right that is important to my family is that you can live anywhere you want to without needing permission from anyone. For instance, my family moved from Vermont to Alaska without a pass from anyone and we still have all the rights of the Constitution.

It would be terrible without the Constitution because people could be arrested for what they wrote. If people had an argument, there would be no court or law to settle it. Also, if there was no Constitution, someone could stop someone from voting. So, the most important thing about the Constitution is it gives us many rights.

Sophora Keo
Wetmore School
Utica, New York

Grade: 2
Teacher: Jo Ann Williams

The Constitution holds me tight and says I don't have to be afraid anymore. I came from Cambodia to a free country that has rules that take care of me. I can talk and write and go to my church. No one can break into my house and burn my things. I know these rules will not change. Great men wrote them 200 years ago. They are still good. The Constitution means life and happiness to me and my country.

We ought to attend the rights of every class of people . . . the grand depository of the democratic principles of the government.

George Mason, 1787

Kevin Lemos
Freeport Elementary School
Freeport, Ohio

Grade: 2
Teacher: Inez Hall

The U.S. Constitution is a lot like a plan or blueprint to build our government. It means a lot to me and our country. It gives all citizens the right to participate in all parts of government, and allows us to enjoy life in our country without fear.

The Constitution was the basis for uniting the States into one great country. The men who put it together were representatives from the States. They were all intelligent and experienced in government, law, banking, farming. Also there were three medical doctors, and men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, who went on to become Presidents. They brought together the basis for uniting the States into one great country and living together in harmony.

Most of these men were God-fearing, so I think they thought about the people who came to this country who were not allowed to worship as they pleased, because their governments wouldn't allow them.

My mother's grandparents came from Hungary, and my father's parents came from Mexico, so that they and their children could live in freedom and not be oppressed. And because they did, I have the right to be anything I want to be and live with freedom and protection. I am proud to know I am one of the people in the government of "We the people of the United States."

I know that God first blessed America when those men sat down and wrote the United States Constitution at Philadelphia in 1787.

Seth Benjamin Lloyd
Genoa Elementary School
Massillon, Ohio

Grade: 2
Teacher: Bonnie J. Jones

If we did not have the freedom to vote for our people who run the laws, our country would have two parts. The United States would be like a torn piece of paper. But since we have many freedoms, we are together like an iron country. If we did not have Presidents, Judges, Senators, and Congressmen to run our country's laws, people would make their own laws. Then people would fight because they wouldn't know another state's or person's laws. Then the iron would turn into thin, broken paper.

It is so important to have laws like our Constitution gives us. The Constitution helps children like me to be safe. It made laws that we can't buy beer, alcohol, gamble, or drive. Because of our Constitution we can be religious, be what we want to be, and go somewhere without asking the President. I can make new friends and go to school. Kids can also get medicine when we are sick.

The Constitution helps our country and all its people to be strong.

Elliot MacLeod-Michael
Palm Beach Gardens
Elementary School
Palm Beach Gardens,
Florida

Grade: 1
Teacher: J. Hirshfield

I like the Constitution because it lets us go free. The rules allow us to have our own privacy, and they let us go to our own church. The rules protect us from bad strangers and robbers.

I like the Constitution because it lets us vote for who we want to be the President and for the judges and for all the other leaders. And we get to help make new laws. It was really nice of Thomas Jefferson and the other men to spend their time on making new rules so that America could be free. And they didn't even get paid!

Kari Michael Grade: 2
Emerson School Teacher: Sue Parham
McAlester, Oklahoma

The Constitution means that all of us, blacks, whites, Indians, and any other group of people in the United States of America, are free and created equally. I am a natural born citizen and sometimes take all my freedoms for granted. When I pledge the flag, I don't stop to really understand what it means. There are people in other countries that can't pledge their flag. They can't worship in a church of their choice, say what they feel, vote, come and go as they please.

Most important of all to me is having a free education. I love school and the Constitution gives me the right to go to school. People from other countries want to come to America to enjoy the same freedoms that we have. Several great men got together in a meeting many years ago to write the Constitution so that I and any U.S. citizen could enjoy living in America. I love America and I always want to live here.

Eric Quanbeck
Triangle Lake
Elementary School
Blachly, Oregon

Grade: 2
Teacher: Paula M. Harrison

In our class experiment, when half had rights and the other half didn't, they didn't get along. The ones without rights were sad, mad, and unhappy. They didn't like it! Those with rights were glad and having fun. Our Constitution gives everyone rights. With rights we get to choose. We can choose where we want to go, what we say, and what we do. But to get along we need rules. The rules are written in the Constitution. We choose a President for our government by voting, and leaders to make laws and people to decide if rules are followed. Without the Constitution our country would not be a good place to live, because people wouldn't get along together. I'm glad we have the Constitution!

Traci Lynn Rash
Locust School
Locust, North Carolina
Grade: 2
Teacher: Ginger A. Watson

I was resting with my light out. Someone lit me. There were three people standing in front of me. They had a feather with ink on it. In front of the one that had the feather was a scroll. I watched him write word by word The United States Constitution. George Washington told James Madison that we should have a Congress, and it should have two bodies. The bodies are the House of Representatives and Senate. Another man said we should have some leaders, a President and Vice President. Ben [Franklin] wants the states to be treated fairly. So for each state to be treated fairly, the people from each state appoint their leaders to vote for the laws. After 4 months the scroll was filled with words. In 1787 the Constitution was finished. They blew me out.

After a long time, in 1791, they lit me again. They had another scroll. George, Ben, James, and other men added amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights means we have the freedoms of speaking, writing, and worshipping. Being a citizen of the United States and following the Constitution is very special. I was shining for the scroll in 1787. I am still shining for the 200-year-old Constitution.

Laura Renz Grade: 2
Price Laboratory School Teacher: Janet McClain
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Suppose you bought some jeans which you hoped would last a year. Years went by and you grew much bigger. Wouldn't you be amazed if, after 200 years, the jeans still fit and were in good shape? It's just as amazing that after 200 years the Constitution is in good shape, even though the country has grown much bigger.

The Constitution works because it helps the states cooperate and keeps us in charge. Before the Constitution became our head law, there had been a very loose national government under the Articles of Confederation. It couldn't force states to trade, give money, or arm troops. It could only ask for contributions. The states had very strong powers. It was as if each member of my family had a different room with separate heat, cooking appliances, and bathroom. If we kept this up we would all be more independent than we wanted to be. Like family members sharing a house, the states got together and signed the Constitution saying they would all work together. It turned out to be best for everyone.

The Constitution is like a tree. The people are the roots. Without the roots, we would not have the trunk of the tree, the federal government, which divides itself into three different branches. Each has its own job and checks on the others so no branch gets too strong. Because of the Constitution, we the people are in charge.

Brooke Roberts
William J. Christian Elementary School
Birmingham, Alabama

Grade: 2
Teacher: Shelby Baker

The Constitution is my country's protection. On a hot, sunny day, if I saw an oak tree, I would get under it. It protects me from the heat.

Two hundred years ago, our forefathers decided we needed a plan to protect our country. Just like the oak tree has many branches, the plan for our country has branches, too. They named their plan the Constitution.

The Constitution's branches have the government on them, and the judges and the lawmakers. They all help our country to be a free place to live. They give us rules and laws to live by.

The Constitution is important because it helps a lot of people. It gives everyone in America freedom. It especially gives me the opportunity to be all that God wants me to be.

Rebecca Rodko
Multi-cultural Magnet School
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Grade: 1
Teacher: Diane DiStefano

The Constitution is like a Stop Sign in the road. The Stop Sign stops you from bumping other people's cars. This lets everyone drive down the road without getting hurt. The Constitution stops you from bumping into other people's freedoms. This lets everyone live without hurting other people's rights.

Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens . . .

James Madison, the *Federalist*

Steven T. Shaba
Jamul Elementary School
Jamul, California

Grade: 2
Teacher: Constance R. Bauer

The Constitution is a law of the United States. The first 10 amendments are called the Bill of Rights. They are the rules for the person's freedom and protection.

The Congress makes the rules of the country. The Supreme Court decides if they are constitutional or not. It is better to have a Congress making the rules than the President because the Congress has many people who discuss every good and bad point of the law. But the President is one man with limited ideas, and he could make mistakes and ruin the United States.

If we didn't have the good laws of the Constitution we would be in a mess like in some countries. When everyone follows these laws it will make the society happy and organized.

Amendment number 13 is a good rule because all people are equal and have their rights. If people didn't have their rights, the country might be separated and cause war and lots of trouble. I think amendment number 18 should not be changed because there are many accidents made by taking liquor, and even I was in one when the driver was drunk. He died and many were badly hurt.

I think some countries should get ideas from the Constitution of the United States, to see how good America is doing and to improve their countries.

Jennifer Skiles
Richland Elementary School
Richland, Mississippi

Grade: 2
Teacher: Cindy Partlow

Long ago, people from Europe came to America and made colonies. The king of England ruled the colonies. The laws were unfair so the colonists went to war against England. In 1776 we became a country. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. It told the king the colonies did not belong to England.

Our new country, The United States of America, needed laws to run the country. So they met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the Constitutional Convention. It lasted 16 weeks from May 25–September 17, 1787. Twelve states came to the Convention with 55 delegates present. Rhode Island sent no delegates. On September 17, 1787, 39 delegates signed the Constitution. The other 16 delegates were either absent or against it. The U.S. Constitution became effective in 1789.

The Constitution divides the government into three branches. Each branch has its own job. The Legislative branch, which is Congress, makes the laws. The President and his helpers, the Executive branch, carry out the laws. The Judicial branch, the Supreme Court and other courts see that justice is done under the law.

The Constitution made it possible so we the people could rule the government. We have the right to elect our own leaders. There are other important rights that we have, too. We can worship the way we wish. We can also ask the government to change unfair laws. We have the right to privacy. We can speak and write our own ideas. Without these laws, I could not write this essay.

I am proud to be an American.

Preston Slaughter
Southwood School
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Grade: 1
Teacher: Mary Nell Atkinson

Two hundred years ago, a group of men wrote the rules by which we live today. It is as important today as it was 200 years ago and is named The Constitution. It gives me the freedom to play, work, and rest as I wish to do. I can use my brain to think any way I choose, even if I do not agree with other people. It also gives me the right to go to school and church, and to spend my money any way I choose. I like living in America.

Jennifer Spade	Grade: 2
West View Elementary School	Teacher: Michael Reed
Muncie, Indiana	

The Constitution of the United States means freedom for all of us. It gives us the right to work where we want, to go to church where we want, and to speak about things we like and do not like.

Without the Constitution, my dad could not have been able to pick banking for his occupation. He picked banking because he wanted to, not because the government told him to take that job. I go to church without anyone telling me when or where to worship. These are a few of the freedoms that the Constitution gives us.

The Constitution protects us against laws which could take away our freedom, our property or even our lives. The laws set up by our government encourage us to be good because if we break the laws, we will be punished.

We are so lucky to live in the United States. Through our Constitution, we are given freedoms that no other country has. The people who run our government are elected to represent us. These people help make laws which protect us.

Some countries change their government through force and fighting, but our Constitution allows us to change peacefully. After 200 years, the Constitution still works! It still gives freedom to everyone in America!

Kristen Strawser
Holy Angels School
Newark, Delaware

Grade: 1
Teacher: Sally O'Haire

The Constitution is like an oak tree. It stands tall and strong for our freedom and happiness. The branches shelter us and make us feel safe.

There is no quarrel between government and liberty. The former is the shield and protector of the latter. The war is between government and licentiousness, faction, turbulence, and other violations of the rules of society, to preserve liberty.

Edmund Pendleton, 1788

Justin Swope
College Gardens
Elementary School
Rockville, Maryland

Grade: 2
Teacher: Laura A. D'Aiutolo

On July 4th, 1976, our country celebrated its 200th birthday. I wasn't born until 1978, so I missed that celebration. However, on September 17 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania we will celebrate the birthday of our Constitution. The Constitution is having its 200th birthday and I want to be there.

The Constitution is important to me. It lets me go to my church. No one is allowed in my house without my permission. I can say anything I want. When I get big I even get to vote for our leaders and maybe I'll be one. I think our country is lucky we have the Constitution. We all pay taxes to help build roads, schools, parks, and courts, and we pay police and firemen, but most importantly, good leaders. They make the laws that we must live by in America. I think the men who wrote the Constitution in 1787 were pretty smart. I'm glad we have the Constitution. I love living in America.

Cam Tharp Grade: 1
St. Peter School Teacher: Michele G. Bieker
Ontario, Oregon

A long time ago some old men got together to make rules for our country. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were there. George Washington was President of the meeting.

It was important to make those rules because the country was new.

They did not want the country to have a king because they wanted the people to have power, too. That is why we have a President and Congress and a Supreme Court.

We can write what we want to say and we can say what we want. Black and white people should be treated the same. These are some of our constitutional rights.

I feel sorry for some people in other countries because they do not get to grow up to be what they want to be.

My great-grandparents did not have very much money and could not buy things in Europe so they came to America to make their life better for their children.

I'm sure glad they did.

Brian Trosclair
Sacred Heart School
Lake Worth, Florida

Grade: 2
Teacher: Joan Hogan

Being eight years old in the United States of America is a privilege. It would be very different living in a country where the government tells you what to do and how to do it.

The laws of the Constitution give my government the power to give its people many privileges and liberties. Freedom for all men, no matter what color, is very important. I can pray or play. I can work or study. I can write this essay and say what is on my mind. All of this, only in America.

What the Constitution is, is a group of rules, and I respect and follow those rules.

Hollie West
Kula Elementary School
Kula, Hawaii

Grade: 2
Teacher: Grace Morata

The Constitution is a set of laws to rule the U.S. And it also means freedom. It was made 200 years ago. Because of the Constitution I have special freedoms. I have the freedom to travel. I have the freedom to have a job. I have the freedom to own my property. I have the freedom to have money and not for the government to take it. I have the freedom to write and say what I feel and not get into trouble for it and go to jail. I have the freedom to go to the shopping mall and buy as much food as I want and clothing for my family. I have the freedom to go to church if I want to. I have the freedom to go to different schools if I want to. And people to protect me. I am proud and lucky to live in a country that gives me all these freedoms.

Carrie Beth Wicks
South Davis Elementary School
Orchard Park, New York

Grade: 1
Teacher: Madonna McCann
Lindy Redmond

The Constitution is a collection of our country's laws written on paper 200 years ago. It was written by a group of American men. James Madison is called the "Father of the Constitution" because he knew a lot about law and history. His ideas were part of this Constitution.

I think of the Constitution as a tree. "We the People" came from many different backgrounds, wanting a free country. They planted the seed of freedom. This seed began to grow into a tree but it was weak at first. When young trees are growing, they are supported by stakes. This young tree was supported by its Presidents and country's leaders until it was strong enough to stand alone.

I think of storm clouds coming. These are the Civil War and World Wars. Lightning would be the bullets and cannon shots that were fired. But at the end of the storms, the sun came out and the tree was still standing.

Just as a tree is living and changing, our Constitution is a "living document," and it changes as our country changes.

As a tree grows new branches, our Constitution added amendments to it so black or white, rich or poor, men or women and different religions all could have an equal vote for our government. Changes give more rights to keep our people safe and happy.

To keep our tree growing and strong, we have to take care of it so it will continue to be a beautiful tree forever.

Rebekah Wolferts
Crockett Elementary School
Bryan, Texas

Grade: 1
Teacher: Beverly Murphy

About 3 years ago my mom and dad and their families came to America, the land of the free. My mom used to live in a one-room house with her parents and four brothers and one sister. They wanted to move to a bigger house but the queen said no. So they had to stay in that little house. Grandpa used to paint houses, but one day he fell from a ladder and hurt his back. He wanted to change his job, so his back wouldn't hurt so much, but the queen said no again. Then my mom's family came to America. They moved into a house with three bedrooms, their own bathroom, and a nice, big yard. They thought they were living in a mansion. My grandpa learned another job, and they were very happy in America. They could choose for themselves. This freedom comes from the Constitution. It helps us to be the best we can be. I want to be a teacher so I can teach other children the importance of the freedom of choosing for ourselves. The Constitution has made America a better place to live than any other place in the world because it is the land of the free.

The Constitution is our set of laws. It brings everyone into one strong country.

Abigail Manya Basch Grade: 4
P.S. 81 Teacher: Marion Goldberg
Bronx, New York

The Constitution is our set of laws. It brings everyone into one strong country. If we have laws that everyone follows, all the people together can act like one strong person.

The Constitution teaches us to respect other people. When we listen to other people we learn from them. These laws and ideas affect us all. For example, they teach us to give people a chance even if we sometimes don't like things they do. We still try to be their friends.

Because the Constitution teaches us to give people a chance, we listen to other people. We don't think people are bad because of their religion or their race. I read books about Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. I'm glad conditions have changed and an amendment was passed in 1865 making slavery illegal. Now I can have friends of all races and learn about their different customs.

I am a Jew. The Jews in Russia have no freedom. They have to give up their religion. They can't even go to a jury about practicing their religion. Also, many Jews in Germany were murdered. I know this cannot happen in the United States.

I feel safe because of the Constitution. Here we have freedom of religion, speech, the press, and also we can go to a jury if people say we have committed a crime. Because of these freedoms and the safety they give us, I think so many people want to come to this country.

Hilda Canes
Brentwood School
Sarasota, Florida

Grade: 4
Teacher: Elaine Oliver

The Constitution is not only a set of laws but a way to help our citizens live in justice and liberty. On September 17, 1787, one of the best moves was made in America.

Forming a country is a very tough job. We should all be grateful for the privilege in living in such a free country as the United States. The idea of the Constitution was to make rules for the newborn country, and help form the government.

The Constitution guarantees freedom for all. There are 27 amendments to the Constitution. The first 10 were adopted in 1791. Many have been changed or amended since then.

I am very glad to be living in the United States. My family and I will never forget what freedom means. The freedom of press, speech and religion offer us a wonderful life.

Since my family and I were born in Cuba, we know what freedom really is. From just wanting to come to the United States my father was put in jail 3 years. Just talking out could put you in jail. Whenever my relatives in Cuba write, I wish they were here to enjoy the freedom I receive.

Many people take the Constitution for granted. We should all be thankful for the Constitution because we need it for our everyday rights. The Constitution is a very important legal document and the basis for the American way of life.

Allison Carden
Bradley Model School
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Grade: 4
Teacher: Sue Jones

The Constitution was written to organize a strong national government for the American states. An important part of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights. This is made up of the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. These amendments protect people from various unjust acts of government; they allow us freedom of religion and speech, two very important privileges. To me, the right to worship freely and to learn about God is very important for there are many places in the world where people are not allowed this religious freedom. A Gideon speaker came to our church recently and shared with us many stories of people in other lands. He told us that these people are not allowed the freedom to worship or learn about God. They had to hide to read a Bible or to talk about religious beliefs. I cannot imagine living in a country like this. Without the Constitution to protect and govern our country, we might be as helpless and as sad as those people hiding in the darkness...

I once saw a film about freedom. And one part of that film made a lasting impression on me. Someone was reciting the Preamble to the Constitution as the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" was playing in the background. I felt a deep sense of pride to know that I am a part of this great land known as the United States of America. And I thank God for the freedom that the Constitution has allowed us all.

Ben Carder
Sulphur Springs School
Jonesborough, Tennessee

Grade: 4
Teacher: Nancy Tester

One day as I was sitting on a rock by the creek, I began to think, "Does every boy have a creek by his house? Does every boy have a chance to go hunting with his dog or go fishing at the pond? Does every boy have the chance to go to church on Sunday? Does every boy have the opportunity to go to school?” I began to realize that every boy doesn't have these opportunities. Why do I have them? I have many privileges, because I live in the United States of America.

As I sat there by the creek, I remembered my teacher telling me the meaning of freedom. In the United States, I'm a citizen with many rights. Our government is a democracy. This means we, the people, help make rules for our country. Our country is guided by the Constitution which was written in 1787 by such intelligent people as Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. If we didn't have this Constitution, people would have no rules to go by.

As I watch the water go down the stream, I am thankful for freedoms the Constitution gives to me. I only wish every boy in the world could have the opportunities that I have in America.

Amanda Carson
Donora Elementary Center
Donora, Pennsylvania

Grade: 4
Teacher: Karen Racunas

This year Americans are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Constitution. The Constitution was written by the men who founded our country. It gives American people laws to live by. Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington all signed it. The Constitution tells us that all people are created equal and that all Americans have the same rights in our country.

In some other countries, people are not allowed to say what they want to say, go where they want to go, or do whatever they want to do. We in America have the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of press. We can go wherever we want to go. This is because of the Bill of Rights, which is the first 10 amendments to the Constitution.

Three years ago, my family went to Washington, D.C. to see our nation's capital. We went to the National Archives Building to see the Constitution. The Constitution was on display and it was protected by two policemen. When it was my turn in line to see it, I was surprised to see how old the paper looked. Seeing all of the famous names signed to it made famous people such as George Washington seem more real to me. It was then that I realized how smart these men must have been to have made these laws for us so long ago.

All Americans should protect, defend, and obey the Constitution. I am proud to be in America because it is a country which is made free by the Constitution. America is truly the land of the free.

Jennie Crump Grade: 3
Ralls Elementary School Teacher: Helen Hedgpeth
Ralls, Texas

Two hundred years ago the Constitution of the United States was formed. In this essay I am going to tell you what that event has meant to me.

My family and I live on a farm in Texas. I think farm life is great! We are free to work and play whenever we choose. My dad grows cotton, grain, wheat, and cattle. My mom stays home and takes care of my three brothers and me. In the summer my mother and I hoe the cotton that we have grown. My whole family works together.

In America, education is free to everyone. Every child, no matter what race or handicap, has the opportunity to be educated. In school we are taught about many different things. This helps a person choose the career he or she would like to have. Any boy or girl can grow up to be a doctor, lawyer, teacher, farmer, or even President!

Religious freedom is our most important freedom. Men and women came to America for freedom of religion. On many of our coins are these words: "In God We Trust." My family and I are free to go to church on Sunday. We can go to any church we want. Many great Americans have been guided through their belief in God.

America is a great place to live. Families can grow together. People can be trusted for their word. Neighbors care for one another. Children grow up with an unlimited amount of opportunities. The Constitution of the United States of America has made all these things possible. God bless America!

Katherine D. Davis
Ford Elementary School
Dunbar, West Virginia

Grade: 3
Teacher: Debra Kersey

The U.S. Constitution means that I don't have to drink from a separate water fountain that says, "Colored," and that I won't have to work for people that want me as a slave or sit in certain places on buses and trains. It means that I can worship the way I wish and that I have a right to privacy and that no one can come into my home unless I allow them.

The U.S. Constitution stands for liberty. It means that neither I nor my country are to be ruled by a president, a governor, or any other person, but that "We the people" rule while they lead us. It means that when I am 18 years of age or older, then I can vote for people that I can trust to help keep us safe, healthy, and free. It means that I can say or write ideas even if the government doesn't agree with them.

The U.S. Constitution is for all American citizens. It gives us rights, but we have to obey its rules and laws in order for it to work for us.

Slaves bring the judgment of heaven on a Country. . . . By an inevitable chain of causes and effects providence punishes national sins, by national calamities.

George Mason, 1787

Alisia Marie DeCrosta Grade: 4
Deer Run School Teacher: Suzanne C. Parker
East Haven, Connecticut

A long time ago, America was discovered. Life was hard and confusing. As time passed, colonies were formed. A war took place so that this country could be independent.

America was like a new baby. Our country needed to grow and learn. This baby needed some help.

Early American leaders decided that rules would help the baby grow and learn the way it should. They decided that young America needed someone to be in charge of its future, a President. They thought that like parents, others would have to help make important decisions, the Senate, Congress, and Courts. Our government was formed. It was decided that this baby country needed to understand its responsibilities and privileges. So, our early fathers wrote down all the rights this baby would enjoy all its life.

America is now an adult. It has a special heritage, our way of life and our beliefs. The set of rules that we were given long ago as a baby is our Constitution. This Constitution gave us a plan for government and our rights as citizens.

As a citizen of the United States, I know that the Constitution means we are free to make choices about our lives. We can give our opinions, read what we want, celebrate the religion we wish.

America has grown into a strong place which all the world looks to. Our Constitution protects our way of life. It allows us to be proud Americans.

"Jami" Elizabeth Eckle Grade: 3
Jesup Elementary School Teacher: Elaine N. Brannen
Jesup, Georgia

Pilgrims came from England over 400 years ago because they wanted freedom to worship in their own way, to earn money for their families, and to get away from England because they thought the king was not fair to them.

The colonies grew and won their fight for independence in the Revolutionary War. Later, wise leaders of our country met at a convention in Philadelphia to guarantee the rights, privileges, and freedoms that the pilgrims wanted and the colonists fought for. The leaders wanted to make sure that future Americans would also have the rights and freedoms. They also organized our government. They did all of this with the Constitution. It tells the government what it can do and what it can't do. It protects the rights of the states and every person in our country. It allows me to say what I want to say, go where I want to go, and live as I please. I can worship with my family as we choose. The Constitution provides all of us with equal rights. It gives me the opportunity to vote when I grow up.

So, I am thankful to the colonists who fought for our independence and to the delegates of the convention who made sure that I would have my freedoms.

The Constitution of the U.S. has supported our nation and served us well for 200 years. The architects did a super job. Because of this great plan, freedom rings for me and our country.

Haidee Hanamaikai
Dry Creek Elementary School
Clovis, California

Grade: 4
Teacher: Charles Bell

The Constitution is very important to me because it is the plan of our country. If the Constitution had not been written, our great country would have failed. If the men who wrote the Constitution had not been so wise, some terrible things might still be going on in the country such as: slavery, unfair treatment because of race, no right to vote because of sex, etc. A lot of these laws have to do with the part of the Constitution we call the amendments.

Writing the Constitution was just like building a house. You cannot just start building a house without some blueprints. It is also impossible to start building a powerful and successful country without a plan. Some of the people that made the Constitution possible were Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Hancock, etc. It is because of lots of great men and great leaders that our country is free and great.

When you look at our flag, remember that the Constitution really gave our country direction and because of that The United States of America is the greatest country in the world.

Susan Hines Grade: 4
High Grove School Teacher: C. Tom Grube
Grandview, Missouri

I was not born a citizen of the United States. When I was 4 years old my parents adopted me from Korea. When I became a citizen, I was given a copy of the Constitution of the United States. I didn't know what it meant then, but now I know more about what the Constitution means.

The Constitution is a plan for how our government is to be run. It tells the requirements for the elected offices and what the responsibilities are.

If enough people disagree with certain parts of the Constitution or want it made clearer, changes can be made. These changes are called amendments. The last amendment changed the voting age from 21 to 18.

When our Constitution was written 200 years ago, the United States was much different than now. It was smaller and most people were farmers. Now the United States is big and powerful. The Constitution has worked all these years and will keep on working to keep America strong in the future, if its citizens help it.

Melissa P. Huebler
Henry Gradstein School, P.S. 166
Long Island City, New York

Grade: 4
Teacher: Roy Moskowitz

The Constitution means many things to me and our country. It is a promise between the government and the American people that our rights will never be taken away. It is an agreement to respect the people and never to make the government more important than the people.

The Constitution is a guiding light in times of trouble. When things are darkest, the Constitution keeps the country on a steady course.

The Constitution is like your parents or grandparents. It watches over you so you don't get hurt. It helps you make decisions and tells you what you are allowed to do. If the rules are unfair, or you outgrow them, the rules can be changed.

The Constitution is the wisdom of the past watching over our future. It is the spirit of the first colonists and the immigrants who came later. It is the blood and sweat of those who serve their country on the battlefield and in public office. It is the strength of those who see a wrong and fight to make it right.

What does the Constitution mean to me? It means my roots, my security, and my home. It means America.

Jonathan Jaffee Grade: 4
P.S. 6 Teacher: J. Mittler
New York, New York

When I walk into my classroom and see all my black and Asian friends, I know that they would not be in my classroom if the Constitution did not forbid segregation. I would not be allowed to sit with them in the same section of the bus. I would not be able to drink from the same fountain.

Each day every person in this nation is affected by the Constitution in some way.

I am a Jew. We, the Jewish people, have always been persecuted in many nations and in many times. The Constitution protects me by giving me the right to practice my own religion.

I plan to be a writer. The Constitution gives me the right to express my thoughts without being punished by the government.

The Constitution prevents one person or a small group from becoming very powerful and taking over the government. Even a majority of the people cannot easily change the Constitution because it is difficult to amend the Constitution.

Even with all of the modern inventions we can still follow the Constitution.

The most important part of the Constitution is that it gives us the right to be different. The Constitution gives me the right to be Me.

Joanna Susan James
Redwater School
Circle, Montana

Grade: 4
Teacher: Delia Groh

The U.S. Constitution means freedom, justice, and a better government to me. It means that I may go where I want, do what I want, and pray in whichever church I wish. Constitutional rights also give the people of the United States the privilege of being able to choose the people who run their government.

In a way, the U.S. Constitution means cooperation to me. If you look cooperation up in a dictionary, it has "working together in a united effort or labor." That is exactly what Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and the others who wrote the Constitution did. Without the cooperation of these people, we would still be quarreling as we were before the Constitution was written.

The U.S. Constitution reminds me of the struggle and sacrifices that took place in the development of our great country. When I read the Constitution, I am reminded of my duty to work hard in school and in everything I do in order to become a good citizen and preserve these freedoms for future nations.

The principle of the responsibility of the individual for the well-being of his neighbors . . . seems always to have been part of the development of the democratic ideal which has differentiated it from all other forms of government.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Casey Jones Grade: 3
Saratoga Elementary School Teacher: Rod Laird
Saratoga, Wyoming

Sunday morning I got out of bed and went to have breakfast. My mom said, "Son, when you're done with breakfast take a shower and get ready for church."

I got in the shower and I was thinking about all the different churches there are. We all can go to whatever church we choose, or not go at all. No government makes us do either.

After church my dad said, "I am going to tell you about gun safety."

I looked at all my dad's guns. I thought to myself, "Gosh! Look at all these guns! In some countries you can't even own one gun!" I smiled and said, "Hey, Dad! Let's go rabbit hunting."

When we got home from rabbit hunting my mom popped her head in the door and said, "I am going to the store. Do you know which store has the lowest price for milk?"

My dad said, "The market." It sure is nice to have a choice of where to buy your groceries.

After dinner, we all were watching the news. The Congress was disagreeing with the President. My mom said that this morning the newspaper was disagreeing with the President, too. I didn't understand what was going on but I did understand that the Congress can argue with the President, and the newspaper and the television can say whatever they want about it.

This freedom of speech and religion, to choose where we spend our money and how we make our money, freedom to own guns, and a lot of other freedoms too, are given to us by the U.S. Constitution.

Ryan Krause
Westlake Hills
Elementary School
Westlake Village,
California

Grades: 4
Teacher: Joni Simon

NEWS FLASH!! "The government orders that all redheads are banned from their homes and must live on the streets of Los Angeles. They are also banned from any jobs. They are not allowed free movement anywhere in the city without a pass from the government."

You know that this makes as much sense as all blacks only being able to live in specific places and restricted in the jobs they hold as happens in South Africa. Or, Jews having to pretend to be Christians and practice Judaism in secret as happened in Spain around 1492. We think that this is ridiculous because we live in a country where everyone is free to be different.

In the United States we are free because of the Constitution. It is the laws and rights of the people who live in our country. It means the freedom to practice my religion, be what you want to be, to be allowed freely in and out of the country, live where you want, and for the people of our country to control the government.

As a Jew in the United States, I feel that the freedom of religion is one of the most important rights in our Constitution. For thousands of years people have been telling the Jews what they have to do and what they have to believe or they will be killed. This can't happen in the United States because of the Constitution. The Constitution is what makes this country great. Whoever lives in the United States is lucky because we are one of the only countries that guarantees these rights. I am fortunate to be an American Jew and have the freedoms that my ancestors did not and many other Jews still do not have today.

Christine Lane
Las Lomas Elementary School
Miami, Arizona

Grade: 4
Teacher: Ruth Johnson

In America, because of our Constitution, we have political, social, and economic freedoms. Our country's Constitution is the master plan which provides each of its citizens guaranteed freedoms as well as a strong government. Along with these freedoms we must be willing to accept the responsibilities. I, as an individual, have the right to my own opinions. I must, however, respect the rights of others to have their own opinions, even if they differ from mine.

The elected leaders of our country must use the Constitution as their guideline so that they may lead the people of this country wisely.

Associate Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., said, "If those who hold and wield power are not sensitive to the guarantees of individual liberty, the likelihood . . . of official lawlessness . . . cannot help but increase."

Our country is made up of people from all over the world. These people from many other nations have come to the United States seeking the freedoms guaranteed by our one-of-a-kind Constitution.

The authors of our Constitution could not possibly know how much our country would change in the 200 years we have been guided by this document. They did, however, realize that the individual citizen would always be the strength of our nation. With our Constitution as the foundation of our government, its authors could insure that our nation's most important resource, its citizens, would always be valued and protected.

Maygan Mellon
Brace Lederle
Elementary School
Southfield, Michigan

Grade: 4
Teacher: Sheila Broderick

Great men, like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and other delegates of the 13 original states met in 1787 because they saw a need for a better government. The 13 states were not acting like they were the "United" States. Instead, they were acting like separate little countries at war. Out of this meeting came the most important document ever written, the Constitution of the United States of America.

The Constitution is the basic law of our country. It is designed so the government is not the master, king, or dictator of the people. Instead, the government is like a servant to help the people. The president, vice-president, senators, and congressmen are all elected by the people. I like the idea of knowing that one day, because of the Constitution, I will be able to vote for the people who will represent me in making the laws of our country.

I'm proud that the Constitution protects my individual rights, my life, my liberty, and my property. I'm pleased to know that if any law or action goes against my constitutional rights, the courts will protect me.

Life in America is not perfect but without the Constitution our country would be in confusion, and there might be nothing to protect our civil rights nor would we have a voice in our government.

Just like a house needs a strong foundation to stand strong, the Constitution is America's foundation on which to build a better life for me and our country.

Julie Merseth
Jefferson School
Red Wing, Minnesota

Grade: 3
Teacher: Julie Thompson

The Constitution is very important to me. Without it you can just imagine what our wonderful country would be like. I'm Korean. I'm adopted, also. And I'm so lucky–one of the luckiest Koreans in the whole world. You know why? I bet you do! Because I got the chance to come to a beautiful country. The one place where our fathers cared enough for us to write out that so important piece of paper, so we wouldn't have to live miserably like some poor, innocent people who don't have rights.

I'm so happy, from the bottom of my heart, that we have a U.S. Constitution. And we can grow up to be what we like.

I'd like to name the word "Freedom." "F" Future–"R" Religion–"E" Equal–"E" Education–"D" Discussion–"O" Occupation or Job–"M" Material.

I'm glad I came to the U.S. They make fair and good laws. Sometimes, I know, I disagree with them. But then I go back and think it over. And you know what I come up with? That they're only doing it so we're safe.

That's one thing I really like about the Constitution. We can say and think what we would like.

Thanks so much for the Constitution! It really makes life a lot, and I mean a lot, easier!

Ernesto L. Otero
St. Rose of Lima School
Miami Shores, Florida
Grade: 4
Teacher: Celeste Jennings

Most people think of the United States as a young country. Yet it has the oldest written constitution among the important nations of the world. The first 10 amendments form the Bill of Rights. The makers of the Constitution had considered it unnecessary to forbid some of the elementary invasions of personal liberty and property rights. Many of the people, however, wanted just such reassurance. As President Reagan said in his recent State of the Union Message: The Constitution of our country is unique because we the people of this country spell out what the role of government will be in the lives of the citizens of our country. In other words, the citizens, through the Constitution, dictate what type of government we will have.

On the other hand, the governments of many countries of the world dictate what type of role the citizens should have in government affairs. Our Constitution is very special to me because my parents have always taught me the importance of freedom and that it should not be taken for granted, since as my parents are always saying, "You do not know what you have until you lose it." My parents lost the country of their birth, Cuba, to communism and had to leave it when they were about my age. But thanks to the many freedoms granted to them as free citizens of our country by our Constitution, I have a loving and secure home, I am free to worship, and I am enjoying the benefits of their successful business which was made possible by the equal opportunity granted to them by our Constitution.

John Owens
Bowie Elementary School
Chicopee, Massachusetts

Grade: 3
Teacher: R. Rechenberger

The Constitution is the set of rules that our government is based on. It was written and voted on by the 13 original states. Our first President under the new Constitution was George Washington and the Vice President was John Adams.

The Constitution means I have freedom and responsibilities. I have the freedom of speech which means I can say the things that I think are right without fear of being hurt. I have the freedom of religion so I can worship the way I want to. I have the right to vote when I am 18. I will be able to vote for the leaders that I feel are right for our country.

I have the right to be represented in government by my state Senators and Congressman. I have the right to choose the school I want to attend, the kind of job I want to have, and the place where I want to live. If I want to travel to another country, I am free to do so. I am free to ride my bike and play sports.

The Constitution also means responsibilities. When I get older, I will have to pay taxes and obey the laws. If my country is threatened, it is my responsibility to serve in the armed forces.

I am thankful that I live in America where I have freedom and responsibilities. Many boys and girls in other countries are not free like I am. I am grateful for the Constitution that promises these freedoms.

Ryan Potts
St. Theresa School
Palatine, Illinois

Grade: 4
Teacher: Sister Mary Ann Poppler

The Constitution of the United States of America formed a new government to give us basic rights. For 200 years we have been living the laws of the Constitution. It has made the United States a more perfect union because it made a government that cannot take away our freedom.

We are not free in the way that we can do anything we want! We are free to change the government through voting. We have the right to a trial by jury. These rights are the same for everybody in the United States.

Another way the Constitution is important to us is the government is responsible for protecting us from other countries. The United States has certain weapons to protect the people from having their rights taken away. However, the Constitution helps us to make peace as well as war.

To form this "more perfect union" we have to do this all together. If we don't get success at first, we have to keep on trying. When they were writing the Constitution the first time, they made mistakes but they did not give up. They kept on going until it was done. This is what we still must do.

As I grow older, the responsibility of living the Constitution is mine. It will take patience, hard work, and time. If this is what it takes to have our freedom, I will keep working to make the Constitution succeed.

The ingredients which constitute safety in the republican sense are, first, a due dependence on the people; secondly a due responsibility.

Alexander Hamilton, the *Federalist*

Ann Marie Quaile
St. Kevin School
Springfield,
Pennsylvania

Grade: 4
Teacher: Marie T. DeVries

The Constitution is often called the "Supreme Law of the Land." In many ways, it is one of the most remarkable documents of its kind ever written. The Constitution provided a system of government that successfully held together the 13 colonies and it still rules us today.

We should be very thankful to live in a free country like America. If we didn't have the Constitution, Americans wouldn't be able to enjoy all the freedom they have.

In my life as a fourth grade student, I appreciate the joy of living in America. I am free to say what I want, I am free to choose my religion, my friends, and my school.

Just as with any privilege, there is also a responsibility. We should be faithful and loyal to our country. Many people have given their lives so that we can live in a free land. I love our country and am proud to live here. When I first visited the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall in Philadelphia a few years ago, I didn't realize how important they were to the history of our country. After studying about the Constitution, I can understand why Philadelphia is often called the birthplace of our nation.

The Constitution is the heartbeat of America. It may have been written years ago by our Founding Fathers, but the people today are still determined as was President Abraham Lincoln, "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Kelly M. Rodko
Multi-cultural Magnet School
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Grade: 3
Teacher: Andrea Prushko

The "right to be me" is the most important right given to me in the Constitution. I'm different from all other people. I have my own religion. I have my own private house in which I feel comfortable. I go to the school I want to go to. I choose the friends whom I want to play with and play what we want to play. This means I'm special!

This country is made up of all special people. They each have their own religion, homes, schools, and friends. They each are allowed to work and play wherever they want, and say whatever they want to say.

The Constitution gives all the people like me the right to be themselves, that is "the right to be us."

. . .If we still will adhere to the design of a national government. . .we must resolve to incorporate into our plan those ingredients which may be considered as forming the characteristic difference between a league and a government; we must extend the authority of the Union to the persons of the citizens, —the only proper objects of government.

Alexander Hamilton, the *Federalist*

Megan Rodriquenz
Pioneer Elementary School
Davis, California

Grade: 4
Teacher: Kate Boyce

One of the earliest memories I have is of my parents' watching election results on television. I thought that was very boring. I did not understand why they were paying so much attention to it. At other times when I wanted my parents' attention, they might be reading newspapers or magazines and discussing things that they read. Now that I am older, I can finally appreciate the importance of these common things that had little meaning to me. Without the Constitution of the United States, I might not have the ability to do these things.

When we first became a country, we had 13 colonies that had their own separate laws. Disagreements were difficult to solve. In 1787 a group of important men created one set of laws for the entire country. This Constitution has an effect on nearly everything we do every day.

If I want to go to church on Sunday, I can pick the church I want to go to. If I do not like what the government is doing, I can vote for people who feel like I do. If I have a dispute with a person, I can go to court to settle it. If I want to understand both sides of a disagreement, I can read about it in the newspaper. If I want to be a doctor when I grow up, I can become one if I study hard enough. If I want to buy something in other states, I can use the same money that I use in California. It does not matter that I am short, am a girl, have brown hair or freckles. I have the same rights as everyone else. All my personal rights are guaranteed by the Constitution.

We drive on good roads paid for by our tax money. Our old people are given help when they are sick. We are protected by our military forces from people who would hurt us.

The Constitution is responsible for all these things. It has allowed us to take care of matters that have been important to us for over 200 years.

Tony Scott
Slocum Elementary School
Defiance, Ohio

Grade: 4
Teacher: Jackie Taylor

The Constitution was written 200 years ago in 1787, at Freedom Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was a blueprint for our federal government as we know it today. It helped unite all of our states into one big, strong country. The Constitution mandated the check and balance system with three branches, the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative. This insured that no single person or group could have supreme power.

The Constitution not only stressed a strong national government, it showed concern for each individual's rights. This concern was most clearly shown by the Bill of Rights. This portion of the Constitution was written to guarantee protection of liberties against possible unjust rule by the strong, national government. Among its rules it stressed freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, civil rights, and rights of the individual concerning criminal matters.

Our country's Constitution has accomplished what our forefathers set out to do. They insured a unified country, with a powerful national government that is still able to grant rights to the individual and tries not to ignore the problems of anyone.

I am thankful that I was born in a country that has this type of constitution. It allows me to be free to make my own choices. It also makes me responsible for them. I am 10 years old now and part of the reason I am living a good life is because people before me have followed the rules of our Constitution. My mind is stronger due to a free press. My soul is stronger due to freedom of religion. My body is stronger due to national awareness of health practices. My future is bright because after 200 years the Constitution is still alive and affecting my life.

Namir J. Shaba
Jamul Elementary School
Jamul, California

Grade: 3
Teacher: Tim Scheidt

The Constitution was written by the founding fathers based on their wisdom, knowledge, and their political experiences under the British rule. They believed that men could solve their problems by discussion and using words instead of fighting and using guns. They wanted to improve the lives of the individuals for a better society and the progress of the country.

Our Constitution respects human beings as we find in the Bill of Rights. In many countries a person is humiliated and tortured. He loses his dignity and becomes an object owned by his government. One person and his party rule the way they want, no questions asked and no objections or else he loses his life and his family gets it, too.

My parents chose to come to this country because of the personal freedom, peace, and a better future. They did not have the freedom to meet as a group, to go on school picnics, to go from one city to another without being checked. Even to get a telephone you need to get permission from security. Newspapers print what the government tells them to print. Television and radio broadcast limited programs. A person feels like a robot carrying the orders of a government. My parents miss their family, friends, and culture. It must be very hard for them because I find it hard to change neighborhoods. As a child, I do not understand a lot of this freedom, but my parents are enjoying their rights such as voting, freedom of speech and religion. They are very happy that they had the opportunity to come to the United States.

I feel very lucky to have immigrant parents to let me know how great the United States is and to appreciate what I have. What makes a country great is not to have high buildings, freeways, shopping centers, and large homes like many countries have. It is a great Constitution that makes the difference.

Meghan Sheridan Grade: 4
St. John Lutheran School Teacher: Beverly Zahrt
Merrill, Wisconsin

In 1787 our forefathers decided a strong government was needed to keep the states together so they wouldn't lose their freedom again. They wrote a constitution that gave us a government with three parts, the President, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. This is important because it makes sure that no one person in the government can have too much power.

The Constitution has lasted for 200 years. The Americans of long ago cared about the future of the United States so that we could have the life we live today. We have the freedom to worship God, speak, read, and write freely and vote freely. We have to be careful not to take our freedom for granted. We should elect people in our government who are fair and honest.

Our Constitution is good, and it's working, but people can make mistakes. We still have bad things like prejudice and poverty and crime. We have to keep trying to make things better and keep the rights our forefathers fought so hard to win. Everyone can do this. I can study all about the government in school and listen to the news and read newspapers. When I'm old enough I can vote for good people to run for government.

Our Constitution and our free country are good examples for other countries who want to have freedom and a good government. I'm glad and proud I am an American.

Merrie Nell Spence
Hockaday School
Dallas, Texas

Grade: 4
Teacher: Sheryl Winn

Why was the Constitution written? First, the Constitution was written so the new country could have a written document with laws for the new Americans. Next, the Constitution was written so there could be a declaration of rights for all citizens. In addition, the Constitution was written so America could be free from being ruled by England or any other countries. Our first representatives wanted to insure that the new Americans would live according to rules made by the founders of the new country.

The Constitution is important to me and my country because it guarantees fairness. It is fair to blacks, whites, men, women, and children–to all people who are U.S. citizens. Each year 270,000 people become naturalized citizens. These new citizens are given the same rights as other citizens.

Since 1787, the Constitution has been working for all of us. Since then, our government has been making it better by adding amendments, but we still have kept the original Bill of Rights. Our Country continues to improve the Constitution and tries to make it better for all.

The news today is filled with reports about bombings by disagreeing groups, wars, and government take-overs by greedy countries. I don't think we have these angry people in America because of the freedoms, rights, and privileges each person is guaranteed in the Constitution. If a person objects to something concerning the Constitution, he isn't put in jail just for saying so. This isn't true in other countries.

In conclusion, I admit I don't know as much as I should about the Constitution, but I do know how important it is. Without our government, based on the Constitution, our country would be cruel and unfair like other countries. Even though I am only 10 years old and only in fourth grade, I know the Constitution is what makes America the "Land of the free and home of the brave!"

Troy A. Stein
Watterson Elementary School
Louisville, Kentucky

Grade: 3
Teacher: Mary K. Hyland

On September 17, 1787 the Constitution was formed at a convention. The states sent 55 delegates to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It took the delegates 4 months to all agree on the laws for the people that were fair to everyone. Such great men as George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin were among the people who signed the Constitution.

The Constitution was formed by the people, for the people. It allows you to read what you want to read. You can write, say, do, and be what you want to. It is important to me to know that I can believe in any religion I want to believe in and join the church of my choice. I have the freedom to go to college and get an education and play pro basketball for a team like the Los Angeles Lakers. I don't have to be afraid of a government or any person telling me what I have to do with my life. Not only me but all Americans have the freedom to make their own choices. Without the laws of the Constitution, the things I like to do and the kind of person I'd like to be would not be possible.

The Constitution of the United States will be celebrating it's 200th birthday on September 17, 1987. Every citizen can join together to celebrate the freedom it has brought to the United States of America.

Jennifer Sterling
North Muskegon
Elementary School
North Muskegon,
Michigan

Grade: 4
Teacher: Joyce A. Ruster

The Constitution isn't a bunch of any old words, but it's a book full of great laws. First, I like it because I can say what I want, where I want, and when I want without going to jail. Another thing I like is that I can't be forced to go to any church that someone might want me to. I think the best law is that we have three branches of government. I like that law best because if there were a king or a dictator I might be thrown in jail for no reason at all.

The Constitution means to our country that we are free. But the Constitution allows us to have life. That means we have to respect the rights of others. The country can change the laws if a vote is held to make everyone happy. Our country must like the Constitution because if there wasn't one, nothing would go right and there might be wars all the time. Our country is ruled by a Constitution. That doesn't mean that it is evil but, in a way, it's like a friend who tells you what you should do.

My responsibility as an American citizen is to obey the laws and Constitution. I should help friends and other people learn and obey the Constitution, too. I'm glad to be an American citizen, so I am willing to do these things.

Brian Martin Taylor
Shelbyville Elementary School
Shelbyville, Texas

Grade: 3
Teacher: Frank Fitzgerald

I wonder? What would the wise men who wrote the U.S. Constitution almost 200 years ago say about their success today? They probably would say, "I never expected that what we wrote would make such a difference in the future. It's amazing that only a few amendments have been made over this long 200 years."

The U.S. Constitution has given our country a form of government that no other country has. We the people, as citizens of this country, have the right to help our government make new laws. It gives us a voice in our government by the election of our leaders.

I like the idea that the Constitution gives us law and order in our country, the United States. I am happy with the fact that it gives us rights. Among these are the right to privacy, worship, freedom of speech, and a voice in our government.

I am only 9 years old and I have celebrated the 100-year birthday of our Shelby County Courthouse, 200-year birthday of Texas, the 100-year birthday of the Statue of Liberty, and the return of Halley's comet. My favorite fact is that on September 17, 1987 the U.S. Constitution will be 200 years old.

Happy 200th birthday, U.S. Constitution!

Teri Thompson
East Marion Elementary School
Silver Springs, Florida

Grade: 4
Teacher: Michelle Butcher

Outrageous, Radical, and Awesome are slang words that today mean totally neat. We can use both slang and dictionary meanings for the men and the paper that was created in 1787 to keep our country's freedom. The men who made the Constitution worked outrageously. They made the rules that would make fairness our number one priority, but the guarantees these rules gave us were totally neat. They were radical men because they worked hard to make sure we would have freedom, but the role model they left was totally neat. It was an awesome undertaking, for nowhere before could man have so much independence. The lifestyle they set up for us was totally neat. That is why when I think of the story of the Constitution and what it means to me, the words Outrageous, Radical, and Awesome come to mind.

[The Constitution] is as radical as the resolution which separated us from Great Britain . . ."

Patrick Henry, Antifederalist

Jonathan Tony
Carrollton Elementary School
Bridgeton, Missouri

Grade: 3
Teacher: Mary Jane Zoeller

This is Jonathan Tony getting out of my time machine in Philadelphia in 1787. I am now walking through the streets to Independence Hall. Let's peek in and see what is going on. Wow! There is George Washington! He was our first President. And there is James Madison, our fourth President. Look at him write! It looks like he is writing down everything. There is Jonathan Dayton. He has the same first name as I do. And look, there is Ben Franklin, our electrician.

It sounds like they are arguing about how long the President should be President. Alexander Hamilton wants the President for life. And other people want the President to have one or two terms. He has to stop at 8 years.

All of a sudden someone grabbed me. It was a guard. He roared at me for peeking in at the meeting. And they threw me in jail.

"Wait a minute. What did I do? What about my rights?!"

The guards said, "What rights? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"The Bill of Rights! The part of the Constitution!" I explained.

"What Constitution?" they asked.

"The one that's being written at Independence Hall," I yelled.

"How do you know, smarty?"

"I'm a visitor from the future. And I'm going back." I pulled a time machine out of my pocket and whizzed home.

I sure am glad I live today with the Constitution.

Eli Tucker
Laura Dearing School
Las Vegas, Nevada

Grade: 4
Teacher: Lee Rayford

I use the United States Constitution every day of my life. Each morning I can look at the newspaper and hear the radio. Each day I can learn from books at school and play baseball with my friends. I can go places without someone stopping me, and I am protected from anyone's trying to harm me. I am free to work toward getting the job that interests me when I grow up, and I can go to the church I want to. But without the Constitution, these things might not be possible. The Constitution guarantees me all these freedoms.

If we didn't have this "law of the land" our country would be in confusion. Each state would still be acting like an independent country, and no one would be concerned about us as a republic. One state would be taxing another, and maybe it would even be alright to drive drunk in one state and not in another. Worst of all, without the Constitution, men would be settling their own problems without going to court; they might use guns to solve things instead.

Even though the Constitution is 200 years old, it keeps expanding to meet our country's changing needs. That way it is never outdated. I think the best thing about it is that it is so fair. Even though the majority of people may rule, the minorities are still protected. Every person is respected. That is what keeps our Constitution and our country things to be proud of.

Joseph A. Urbanski
Eisenhower Elementary School
Crown Point, Indiana

Grade: 4
Teacher: Patricia Radu

The Constitution is a piece of paper that states the main laws of our country. But to me the Constitution means more than some laws. It means freedom, willingness, and a great country.

Our Constitution is the base of our country, just like a foundation and frame. The foundation of a building supports it and the frame keeps it together. You see, our country is just like a building. The police are the custodians. Congress and the President are the managers or the landlords. The military is the brick or outer cover which protects us. The American Citizens are the tenants. So, you see, the Constitution is very important to every American Citizen.

To obey the law is to support democracy. If every man thinks every law must suit him in order that he shall obey it, he does not support democracy but destroys it. The basis of good government lies in the fact that the people are willing to obey the law as they have determined it to be.

William Howard Taft

Greg Williams
Wallace Elementary School
Hammond, Indiana

Grade: 3
Teacher: Sandra J. Wilkening

I'm glad to live in America because we have our Constitution and the freedoms it gives us.

The Constitution gives us certain freedoms such as freedom of speech, religion, and the pursuit of happiness. It allows us to do what we want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.

The Constitution also protects us from military intrusions in our homes in times of peace.

I feel grateful to have a Constitution that allows us to go from place to place without being questioned.

Even though I am blind, the Constitution gives me the right to be treated like a nonhandicapped person. I get to go to a regular school, be with regular kids, and do the things they do. It also gives the mentally handicapped a chance to have an education.

America has stayed a strong country because of the Constitution. It has provided us with a strong and patient government.

The Constitution gives Congress the right to make and change laws. The Supreme Court watches over the laws. When changes in government are needed, the Constitution provides for a way to change peacefully. I know that, in the future, when I am grown up, I will be able to make changes when they are needed.

What the Constitution really means to me and my country is *freedom for all.*

[Translated from original braille copy.]

The United States Constitution is like the foundation of a good home.

GRADES 5 & 6

Raphelia Begaye
Thoreau Elementary School
Thoreau, New Mexico

Grade: 5
Teacher: Sandy L. Inman

It's great to be an American! America is like a huge streamlined jet airplane. Being a part of this jet, I am free as any bird in the sky. I think it is great that I can be a passenger on this jet called America.

Let's take a trip on this jumbo jet. We passengers speak many languages. We can read the newspaper of our choice, we worship God in the manner we wish, and we defend any opinion we desire. The rich man shares his seat with the poor man; and yet, the poor man has the opportunity of becoming rich someday.

The only ticket you need for this plane is the love of freedom and democracy. I have to get my ticket punched every election day. If I don't, I may not get the best seat. The 50 states are part of this fantastic jet. Every piece is joined together tightly so this nation won't crash.

The engine of this jet was built in Philadelphia at Independence Hall in 1787. The brakes of this big jet are the *Bill of Rights.* These rights protect me!

The engine of this jet was built by agreeing that the central government was not to interfere in the affairs of the states, so long as the states did nothing to interfere with the basic laws of the Constitution. All state officials were to take an oath to support the Constitution as the law of the land. This American jet gets better as the country grows and new needs arise.

This American jet has a legislative branch, which is headed by the House of Representatives and Senate, the executive branch which is headed by the President, and the judicial branch which is headed by the Supreme Court. These branches defend the Constitution by protecting our rights. The Constitution also protects the many different cultures of this nation. This is very important to me since I am a Native American. I am a 10-year-old Navajo girl.

Louis Bernstein
William Ray School
Chicago, Illinois

Grade: 6
Teacher: Irwin Pollock

I believe that the Constitution of the United States is the binding of our country.

The Constitution lets us speak and believe what we want and when we want. This has a special, personal meaning to me because I'm Jewish, and my Jewish heritage and faith are both very important to me. In the history of the world, many countries have been very cruel to Jews, not letting them practice their religion. In Russia, today, Jews are jailed daily because they practice Judaism. In America, we are free to observe and practice Judaism.

It's a nearly perfect mixture of certain boundaries and limitations to prevent chaos, bedlam, and crime, and the gift of liberty that lets us know that we can say, do, and feel what we want without having the fear that our actions or words are being watched and censored.

The Constitution means freedom, and freedom, if handled correctly, means peace.

The Constitution's 13th amendment, the Abolition of Slavery, made slavery or involuntary servitude illegal anywhere in America except as punishment for a crime. The 14th amendment, the Civil Rights amendment, allows anybody born in America to be a citizen of both America and the state in which he or she resides. The 15th amendment, Negro Suffrage, gives anybody the privilege of voting, regardless of race.

The Constitution and its amendments have been polished and continue to be polished so that most every citizen of the United States may have what many other countries deny their citizens–freedom.

April Joyann Butler Grade: 6
Lake Weir Middle School Teacher: Verna Williams
Summerfield, Florida

The Constitution of the United States of America is an historical document that should have and must have a very special meaning to all Americans, including me. This year marks the 200th year of its existence. It has weathered the test of time as "the supreme law of the land."

High praise from one famous British statesman William E. Gladstone referred to the Constitution as "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man."* From this great beginning, America's governmental authority has survived for two main reasons. The built-in beauty of this living document is its flexibility to adapt and change with people and times. Over the last 200 years, America and her people have certainly experienced drastic changes, in all areas of existence. Our Constitution has been as applicable to an agricultural nation of 13 states of 4,000,000 people as it has to an industrial nation of 50 states of 200,000,000 people.

Its second greatest asset is the authority given to it by our founding fathers. It sets forth rules of procedure that must be followed even when critical circumstances arise. Yet these fundamental laws do not prohibit Congress its inherent right to pass supplementary laws as needed.

The Constitution touches all of our lives in three major areas. First, it establishes a federalist form of government wherein some powers belong to the national government and some belong to the states. To me, this means I have "dual citizenship"–to my state and to my country, at the same time. Secondly, the Constitution separates, checks, and balances powers. It establishes three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. For me, this means I am protected from any form of governmental dictatorship. Thirdly,

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* *The Encyclopedia Americana.* Americana Corporation. New York. 1968. Vol. 7. pp. 659–676.

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and perhaps, most importantly, the Constitution protects individual liberty. Many safeguards appear in the Constitution, while others were written into the Bill of Rights, which was ratified in 1791.

To me, my rights as an American, my freedoms, are guaranteed under the Constitution.

If I were to compare the Constitution to a house, it would be the bricks which form the walls of America—the house in which I dwell. It is a beautiful, strong house that is my shelter against the harsh existence outside America. I live in the best country in the world, and the Constitution keeps it that way.

Boun Chaialee Grade: 6
Colonel Crawford School Teacher: Ann Johnson
Carey, Ohio

The United States Constitution was adopted 200 years ago, and spells out freedom for me and for all Americans.

Since my family was forced to leave our country, which was taken over by Communists in 1975, I do not take our freedom for granted as do many native-born Americans.

Our founding fathers believed that each person has worth and value because he is a human being. I feel secure knowing that the government here in America protects the rights of all. It is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

In America I am free to speak without fear; free to stand for what I think is right; free to oppose what I believe is wrong; and free to choose those who govern this country.

When I am old enough, I can choose how I will make a living. No one can force me to take a job I do not want, as dictated in a Communist country. America is a land of free enterprise where I can own property. The right to justice is given to all who live in the United States.

With freedom go duties and responsibilities – a duty to vote; a duty to learn about our government. All Americans have a Bill of Duties as well as a Bill of Rights. If I carry out these responsibilities, I, along with all Americans, can enjoy these freedoms for another 200 years.

Sameer Chopra
Proctor Elementary School
Topsfield, Massachusetts
Grade: 6
Teacher: Alfred B. Jones
Janet Rider

"P.S.–hope to see you soon!" While writing a letter to my friend in another state, I gave no thought to the reason I was allowed to do this. Just taking it for granted, I guess. What about all the other things I did that day: went to school, read the newspaper, talked to my friends, watched television, listened to the radio, bought baseball cards, etc. In one way or another, they all lead to the "supreme law of the land," the Constitution. Most of the people in the U.S. don't realize or think about the Constitution while living their life "freely." Everything we do today is based upon many ideas written on a single sheet of paper by great men 200 years ago, when they desired to build up the newborn nation.

Besides my own personal reasons, the Constitution means much to our country. As a part of the First World, the U.S. is highly industrialized and developed. Many inventions and new things such as the telephone and television wouldn't be here if it weren't for article 1, section 6. The Constitution also gives people and immigrants the right to practice their own religion. Many other things affect us, but our government is the main matter.

The U.S. is a republic where we elect whom we want to govern us; the Constitution promises this. The little piece of paper prevents the President from canceling all elections and ruling forever. The great document gives much power to Congress: declaring war, coining money, collecting taxes, etc.

So, for many years to come, let us think about everything it gives us, and how it made America what it is today.

Jennifer Cox
Blanco Junior High School
Langlois, Oregon

Grade: 6
Teacher: Vincent Swagerty

Our Constitution is celebrating its 200th anniversary. Over the years this document has kept civil order, provided for people's rights, and amazingly, only 26 changes have been made in the form of amendments.

To me, I think the most important guarantees of the Constitution are those enforcing equality. I feel that all people should have civil treatment. Those of a different race may not have a similar appearance, but that says little about how a person really is inside. Originally, the Constitution made allowances for slavery, however, in 1865, it was abolished. This is an important point that shows the Constitution allows for changes.

Also, the Constitution states the fact that women have the right to vote. This is a good right, for men and women both can have respectable opinions on various topics. Just because men have a few extra muscles, it doesn't mean that they must tower over and dominate women and their thoughts. Although the proposed amendment stating total equality between men and women was defeated in 1982, I feel that if passed, it would have been a new breakthrough in creating even more equality.

Our Constitution is really our country's guideline for everyday life. It has kept our country in order throughout hectic times. I feel that without our Constitution, we would not have evolved into the free and democratic country that we are today. The Constitution is a necessary part of keeping America the great place it is.

Ronald Cureton, Jr.
Bunker Hill Elementary School
Washington, D.C.

Grade: 5
Teacher: Marilyn F. Jones

My mother says that the Constitution is very important, and that I should understand how it helps me in everyday life. The Constitution means to me freedom to be whatever I want to be in life. My teachers tell me that the Constitution is the foundation of our nation. I think that the Constitution keeps our country together like a family.

The Constitution of the United States is like an umbrella where all the people, no matter what their backgrounds may be, are covered by the laws of the land. Laws that we all must follow to make our country whole. We all can take cover and get protection under this umbrella, because the laws were written for all citizens.

Freedom is very important to me. I want to be able to make choices in my life. The Constitution states that we have freedom of religion, speech, and the press. When I grow up I want to be a doctor. Being able to read all the information I can get, and listening to other people speak, is important in learning how to be a doctor.

As a young Black student I want the opportunities and equal rights you see in this great country of America. You can be what you want to be if you work hard and obey the laws. Because the U.S. Constitution protects me as a citizen, one day you will be able to call me Dr. Ronald Cureton, Jr., M.D.

There is your choice, gentlemen. A vote against the Constitution is a vote for mystery and nonsense. A vote for it is a vote for clarity and sense.

Robert R. Livingston

Travis S. Dial
Lincoln Orchard Mesa
Elementary School
Grand Junction,
Colorado

Grade: 5
Teacher: Mark Schmalz

As a 10-year-old boy, I am just beginning to study about the Constitution of the United States. Now I realize that I have been learning about my country's freedoms all of my life. These liberties are a part of me, like my five senses–the senses of hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, and seeing.

When I *hear* all of the news, good and bad, being reported and when I *hear* people talking about our country, I remember we have freedom of the press and the freedom of speech. I think of how lucky we all are when I *smell* and *taste* the delicious food at my grandmother's Thanksgiving table. With pride, I *touch* my hand to my heart and feel it beating faster as I say the Pledge of Allegiance. I *see* the opportunities Americans have when my parents take me with them when they go to vote.

The Constitution has guaranteed to every person in this country the cherished privileges of all free men and women. It is the foundation of the laws that protect us, benefit us, and provide for us. The Constitution allows all citizens to become whatever they want to be. Everyday, the blessings of liberty, made possible by our Constitution, influence our lives.

Just as my five senses are a very important part of me, so is the Constitution an essential component of our country. It is my hope our Constitution will always be defended and remain deeply rooted in our hearts forever.

Margaret Natalie Duerksen
Fort Stockton Middle School
Fort Stockton, Texas

Grade: 6
Teacher: James O. Payne

This morning, I read a letter to the editor in our newspaper criticizing our government. The writer of that letter will not have police knocking on his door to arrest him because of what he has said. This morning, I went to the church of my choice. Tomorrow, I will go to school with 800 boys and girls of different backgrounds, different abilities, different goals. Tomorrow, my mom and dad will go to jobs which they chose. We have a German exchange student with whose family we communicate through uncensored mail and unmonitored phone calls. Later this week my family, some friends, and I will travel to Europe without hindrance or months and months of red tape. Everyday common events? Maybe. But they are all freedoms guaranteed by my United States Constitution.

To our country it is, odd as it may sound, the freedom to change within the security of stability. That means that our government can change to meet the needs of our times, without sacrificing 200 years of stability and security established by the United States Constitution.

Sean Glenn Fimmel
Hatton Public School
Hatton, North Dakota

Grade: 5
Teacher: Clark Soholt

The United States Constitution is approaching 200 years of age. The United States Constitution is like the foundation of a good home. The good home is the United States of America. We are protected by a strong foundation. In time, the home was added to, to keep up with change, and the foundation remained strong and, at times, was also adjusted to keep the home well supported. These changes are called amendments. The first 10 changes are called the Bill of Rights. They were added just a few years after the approval of the United States Constitution. Since then, the United States Constitution has only been changed 16 times. America, our home, has a good foundation. I feel good knowing that we are protected by it.

When our founders had only disconnected sovereignties with which to face the aggressive empires of their day, they found strength by adopting the principles of federalism. That was a flexible formula that made it possible to have unity with respect to selected matters that were of common concern while leaving state sovereignty undisturbed as regards all other matters.

John Foster Dulles, *The New Federalist*

Jamie Gibson
Audubon Park
Elementary School
Orlando, Florida

Grade: 5
Teacher: Linda Puryea

The United States Constitution is the basic written contract for all our laws and has set general rules for all our society. It was formed through compromise. Not all those who developed it agreed with everything, but they were willing to discuss and allow different opinions to be presented. They often gave in on one thing to get another. An example of this was the agreement to have two houses in the legislature to represent more people.

Because of the Constitution's guidelines, we have the right to attend schools, since taxes can be collected for the good of all people. We also have the right to be treated fairly in the school and be told of our progress.

Even our classroom rules are designed along the same guidelines that guarantee the opportunity to learn and to help in making decisions for our classroom.

Last year, the school board decided to move my neighborhood into a new district. I would have had to go to a new school that was several miles from my home and across some busy highways. Because of our state laws based on our Constitution, changes must first be published for everyone to see. Then changes are discussed at public meetings. Our neighborhood wrote letters and suggested other ideas. I helped by delivering leaflets in my neighborhood. I was allowed to continue attending the schools nearest my house. I am happy to live in a country where I can travel freely and express my opinion. I'm glad we have a constitution.

Ryan David Girod
Las Colinas School
Camarillo, California

Grade: 5
Teacher: Beverly Rueckert

"This year I will celebrate my 200th birthday. I am old, but I am still going strong. Although I started out guaranteeing the freedoms of a brand new country, I still protect those freedoms today. I am the law of the land. I am the Constitution of the United States of America."

The Constitution speaks to everyone. It says that everyone should be treated fairly, that all people have the right to live in peace and that they are free. It doesn't matter whether a person is rich or not, what color his skin is, whether he is handicapped or not, male or female, an adult or a child. The Constitution is for everyone. The Constitution is important to me and my family.

My dad is the pastor of a church. The Constitution says that we can go to the church that we want to and worship God the way we want to.

I have a newspaper route. The Constitution says that people can write what they want in the newspaper, even if they disagree with what the government is doing. And they can help to change it.

I am a Cub Scout, and I play on a soccer team. The Constitution says I can get together in a peaceful way with other people.

Even though the Constitution was written 200 years ago, it is important to me today. My responsibility is to appreciate it, make sure that everyone shares its freedoms, and pass it on to future generations.

Rachel Hildebrand Grade: 5
Saint Mary Gate of Teacher: F. Soriente
Heaven School
Ozone Park, New York

The Constitution Means Freedom. We have the right to worship as we please. We can disagree about things the government is doing without being arrested. We can watch television and read papers that give the truth. We know that we are not being told just what the government wants us to know.

The Constitution Means Equality. We are all the same under the law. A bag lady has the same right to a fair and speedy trial as does a lawyer. In some countries the government tells people what to do with their lives. Because of the Constitution, Americans can decide for themselves what type of work will make them happiest. We have no limits on what we can do or become. A poor man like Abraham Lincoln was able to become President.

The Constitution Means Responsibility. We have the duty to vote for the people who will run the country. It is up to us to make sure that honest and moral people are in charge. We have the responsibility to change bad laws. We have the responsibility to teach each other not to be prejudiced. We have the responsibility to teach each other about right and wrong and the truth.

The Constitution Means Hope. Americans have the hope of a better tomorrow. We know that we can change things. Our Constitution is an example to the rest of the world. It shows people who are living in fear and depression that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people can really work.

Rana Javid
Vieja Valley School
Santa Barbara,
California

Grade: 5-6
Teacher: Will Hayes

The Constitution and especially the 10 amendments mean a lot more to me than to most children. My brother and I were born and lived in a country that lacked most freedom.

When I read about the guarantee of freedom of speech, I remembered how we always had to be careful of what we said, even in front of close friends, and how "to trust somebody" was a dangerous thing to do.

"Right to speedy trial, witnesses, right of trial by jury." Only God knows how many innocent people and those dear to our family were captured, tried, and executed, sometimes in less than 15 minutes and many younger than 20 years old. Their only fault was speaking about freedom. For this crime they were shot or hanged.

"Right of search and seizure." Do you know how it feels to relax in your own home as our family does now, knowing that no armed soldiers will rush in our house, search everywhere, and scare my mother, father, brother, and me half to death. In my country, we experienced this several times.

I have not been in this country long enough to understand all the contents of the Constitution, but I only know I appreciate the 10 amendments. We had a hard time coming here as immigrants. We were exiles in several other countries before we were able to enter the United States. Now I feel and I can see that all we went through was worth it to be free.

Shannon Judge
St. Thomas of
Canterbury School
Cornwall-on-Hudson,
New York

Grade: 6
Teacher: Kathy Brown

Communism, terrorism, frequent civil wars, and destruction aren't part of America. They easily could be, if it weren't for our Constitution. Without this basic document, America wouldn't be nearly as great and free.

Two hundred years ago our country, vast in size but small in population, began as an experiment in freedom. During the next 20 decades, this fragile concept has succeeded far beyond all hopes of our forefathers. Even from our mistakes we have learned, which makes this idea of freedom for all even stronger and more durable.

The Constitution was written to guide our country along the path of freedom. As we grew and developed, only a few amendments were added to it. These changes further strengthened this precious document, to give more freedom to people.

This first law of our land has continued to exist not only because it was and still is a good document, but also because Americans have willingly fought, sacrificed, and died to preserve it.

Because of the Constitution, I can walk through green forests or busy cities. No soldiers, tanks, or barbwire limit my freedom. I can visit friends and family in other parts of this mighty country without showing identification papers or going through checkpoints. I am free to attend church or whatever school I want and get whatever job I am capable of doing. The Constitution guarantees this to me.

My very freedom is contained in the pages of this document and that is what the Constitution means to me.

Jennifer Kennedy
Hunter Elementary School
Raleigh, North Carolina

Grade: 5
Teacher: Susan Cartwright

As a young woman interested in the field of TV journalism, the Constitution and its amendments are important to me in many ways. The Constitution provides me the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech. As a reporter I will be able to report the truth to the American people, even if that truth discloses problems in our own government. I can express my own opinions even if they are contrary to popular beliefs.

The freedom of religion is important to me. I have the right to worship my God the way I choose and where I choose. The Constitution provides me, a woman, the right to vote. I will be able to vote for the candidates of my choice and campaign openly for them if I choose.

I will be able to buy my own home with the knowledge that my property cannot be taken away from me unfairly, nor can my home be searched unreasonably. I have the right to be treated equally under the law with other people. This means I cannot be discriminated against in my choice of jobs simply because I am a woman.

Although the rights of women are covered for the most part in the 26 amendments, I have the right to petition the government for changes in these laws if they are needed, and the Constitution provides the means to amend or change these laws. The Constitution is important to me and the American people and has been that way for 200 years.

I have lived to realize the great dream of my life—the enfranchisement of women. We are no longer petitioners, we are not wards of the nation, but free and equal citizens.

Carrie Chapman Catt

Kim Ann Kim
Whiting Lane School
West Hartford,
Connecticut

Grade: 5
Teacher: Patricia
Zimmerman

The Constitution is important to me because it gave my family freedom.

My father is from Cuba. Cuba made my father come to America under cover. My dad asked my grandmother, his brothers, his sister, and his stepfather to come to America. Unfortunately, they refused.

When he came, he didn't have to do the work for Cuba. Instead, he realized that America could give him freedom to work for himself, so, he stayed. Now, he can do anything as long as it isn't illegal. He also has freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition.

My father soon got a job at McDonald's and went to school. He started working with my mom's stepfather and met my mom. They started going steady. Soon they ran away to New York and got married.

They had two daughters. One is my 16-year-old sister named Angela Kim and me, a 10-year-old girl named Kim Ann Kim.

The Constitution in America let my father choose where he wanted to live. It didn't tell him what job to work, and we are grateful for our freedom.

Thank you, America!

Hail to this festival!—all hail the day!
Columbia's standard on her roof display!
And let the people's motto ever be,
"United thus, and thus united, free!"

Francis Hopkinson
Federal Procession of 1788

Katherine Windust LeVeen
Manchester Elementary School
Manchester, Maine

Grade: 5
Teacher: Carol A. Jowdry

The streets are silent and empty. The doors are locked, and the windows are barred. In cellars people hold secret meetings to discuss their lack of freedom and choice. Priests are gathering small groups to offer hope and to encourage faith among themselves. Brave men and women are busy printing their own secret newspaper to distribute among the freedom believers. Undernourished children peek out from behind the windows.

This is what our country could be like even today if it were not for the Constitution of the United States!

While the Revolutionary War made the American colonists independent of Great Britain, the history of the United States as a nation really began when the Constitution was adopted by Congress in 1791. With its adoption, each state ceased being a sovereign nation and became part of this new country. The whole idea of the Constitution is that it makes every man equal and protects the rights of every individual.

The Constitution was meant to be interpreted and is not a fixed document. The Bill of Rights is a testament to this fact. The Constitution is as valued today as the day it was written, and it is open to change as the ever-changing times.

We are indeed fortunate to be the descendents of those who conceived of a nation where people would govern their own lives. It has enabled us to enjoy our many freedoms which we so freely take for granted.

Mia Lobel Grade: 6
Bethlehem Central Teacher: L. Boyer
Middle School
Delmar, New York

The Constitution,
so powerful, so strong.
Laws of the people,
none of them wrong.
Everyone is equal,
be black, white, or yellow.
Every woman,
every fellow.
What you can, and cannot do,
what is right, what is true.
The jobs of officials,
both big and small.
How to do them,
for one and all.
An organization of U.S. land,
our symbol, the eagle, strongly stands.
Freedom of Negroes,
no more slaves.
Free to fly,
or explore dark caves.
A crime is done,
no fear!
The laws protect,
the people dear.
Save many lives,
with drinking laws.
Certain ages,
a certain cause.
New laws are made,
everyday.
To make things go a better way.
People always have a say,
in laws to live by, day by day.

Of course the people have to help,
to make these laws come true.
But think awhile,
you'll begin to smile.
This is all for you.
What the Constitution means to me?
Helping.
Safety.
Freedom.
Peace.
The United States glory,
shall never cease.
NEVER!

Beth Marland
James Buchanan School
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Grade: 5
Teacher: Timothy A. Mackey

The Constitution gives us freedom of speech, election of officials, and choice of jobs. We also cannot be imprisoned, killed, or have our property taken away from us without a trial.

In other countries they may not have these freedoms like in Guatemala, Russia, Cuba, or some other countries. When we were in Guatemala we saw that there were very few men in Solola because they had been killed. The military went up and down the streets deciding who they were going to throw in jails. They could arrest anyone they wanted. Our car was stopped twice. Sometimes the military went out just for the fun of hunting and shot the Mayan Indians just like we would shoot a deer. They forced the Indians to live up in the mountains so they could have the land. No one could speak against the government or he would be arrested. There are no free elections. A lady whom we know there runs an orphanage, and she helps kids get to the United States for medical care. Once she tried to get a child out and an official got mad at her for helping poor people. She had to go into hiding so she wouldn't get killed. The Constitution means that we don't have to live in fear like in some other countries, but in freedom. I'm glad that we have the U.S. Constitution.

Carl E. McCrary
Briarcrest Ridgeway School
Memphis, Tennessee
Grade: 6
Teacher: Carla McCrary

It is the Constitution that makes our country great. When I spell CONSTITUTION I think of these things:

C is for the CONGRESS that represents all the states, large and small.
O is for the OPTION to worship who or what we want and how we want to.
N is for the NATIONAL defense that is insured by the Constitution.
S is for the SUPREME Court, the highest law of the land.
T is for the fair TRIAL by jury that the Constitution offers everyone.
I is for the INDIVIDUAL liberties given us in the Bill of Rights.
T is for the TAXES that are necessary for paying the national debt.
U is for the way we UNITED all the states to make one, strong country.
T is for the THANKS we give the men who wrote the Constitution.
I is for the INDEPENDENCE our country developed by writing the Constitution.
O is for the way we OPEN our doors to other peoples to share our freedom.
N is for one NATION under God, asking for His daily leadership.

The Constitution offered a new form of government that many people thought would fail, but instead it has become the backbone of a great nation.

Jakob Nelp
Pomona Elementary School
Montrose, Colorado

Grade: 5
Teacher: Del Hagemann

I had just woken up in the damp, dark cell. As the guard walked by I pleaded with him to tell me why I was suddenly in this worndown prison cell. I was sure that I had done nothing that would put me in jail.

I remember the soldiers barging into my humble home and jerking me into a black military jeep. I had no ammunition to defend myself, so what could I do?

The guard said to me, "By the way, you won't be needing one of your lawyers because there will be no trial for you." Tears came to my eyes because I felt so very helpless.

I was handed a newspaper and the headlines on it said. "PREMIER ABOLISHES COURT SYSTEM!" I read on only to find that the Premier also had declared himself as the only Representative and Senator in the United States of America. To accomplish this daring task, he sent some more soldiers, like the ones that took me, to take the Members of Congress to an isolated jail.

By the time the Premier had totally wiped out the three branches of the federal government, they had ended my sentence.

What does the Constitution mean to me and to our country? It means that this story is fiction.

Kathryn Provencher
Fausey Elementary School
West Springfield, Massachusetts
Grade: 5
Teacher: C. Kusek

The Constitution means a way of life for the people of this country that is better than in many other nations of the world.

It is: The freedom from years of slavery for the black people.

It is: Families of immigrants entering this country and having the right and opportunity to improve their lives.

It is: The right of women to finally have the power to vote in elections.

It is: An elderly black woman in the South having the courage to sit in the front seat of a bus or to drink from a "white only" water fountain after years of segregation.

It is: A soldier dying in World War I or World War II or Vietnam so that others may live in freedom.

It is: Jews, Protestants, and Catholics free to worship any God they wish.

It is: A criminal having the right to a fair hearing in Court and to be innocent until proven guilty.

It is: A poor family in any city receiving government food, shelter, and medical care.

It is: A newborn baby with the right to grow up to attend any school, learn any trade, and work at any job he is able to do.

It is: The elderly people who get government Social Security checks, Meals on Wheels, or lower cost medical care.

It is: Freedom, protection from harm, and equal rights for all and. . .

It is ours!

Alison Rieth
Prospect Elementary School
Elyria, Ohio

Grade: 5
Teacher: Nancy T. Norton

Good afternoon, I would like to invite you to my 200th birthday party this year. Some of you younger folks may feel I'm pretty old. I must say I'm not only getting older, but better.

Before I was born, many people disagreed with my birth for they felt I would not last more than a decade. As it turns out, I'm now the oldest written instrument of national government.

Although there were many bumps and potholes, on September 17, 1787, I was born. Like many babies I had a lot of growing and learning to do. As I was in "school," it seemed I took tests everyday. Other kids were always picking fights with me. Everyone who read me had different thoughts. I had many court disputes to settle. Sometimes I had to add to myself. My biggest test was the Civil War. I did not believe in slavery at all. Sometimes I felt I was going to get an F on that one. Eventually, everyone felt I was right.

As I got older, I also got better. People were paying more attention to me. I was able to solve more and more problems for people. You might think being 200 years old makes me feeble and worthless. Well, I'm not any of them! I'm still going strong. I'm healthy and improving myself everyday. I think I owe my strength and good health not only to my parents but also to anyone who took an interest in me. I, The Constitution, Am Proud To Serve You The People.

Elizabeth Annette Sanders
Southwest Georgia Academy
Damascus, Georgia

Grade: 6
Teacher: Martha Jean Jordan

The Constitution of 1787 was, like Betsy Ross's flag, a handmade, homemade, American original. The delegates thought, debated, often fought to create a Constitution personnally suiting the lifestyle of Americans.

This lifestyle appealed to my Irish great-great-grandfather, Jeremiah Driscoll. In 1849, he came to America. In 1852, when the Constitution was only 65 years old, Driscoll became an American citizen. He signed his naturalization papers, "I, Jeremiah Driscoll, relinquish all allegiance to foreign powers," adding, "and especially to the Queen (of England)." Though Driscoll never forgot his Irish roots, he always proudly considered himself an American.

Driscoll began a homemade bridge of a personal family relation to the Constitution.

In 1920, Driscoll's granddaughter was born. Affected by Amendment XIX, her generation was given women's suffrage that year. Driscoll's great-granddaughter was granted by Amendment XXVI the constitutional right to vote at age 18.

The Constitution will become 209 years old in the year 1996. That year, I will begin to fulfill my work on the bridge. By casting my vote, it will be my first election ballot. I will take my place as an adult citizen of the United States of America.

What does the Constitution mean to me? It means honor and freedom. I am proud to be an American because the Constitution gives me and my country a plan to grow toward.

Christopher J. Smith
Thompson Junior High School
Newport, Rhode Island

Grade: 6
Teacher: Julie Carlson McAlpine

Dear Constitution,

Constitution, you are so very old,
You are so priceless, you are like a bar of gold.

For being sterling bright and staying alive for 200 years,
We all celebrate your birthday with many cheers.

Freedom of speech, states' rights–
Boy, the people who wrote you were very bright.

Checks and balances is no game.
Executive, Legislative, and Judicial are the same–
They share the power, they share the fame.

From 1787 to 1987,
The people who wrote you, I know went to heaven.

Trial by jury is a right
Guaranteed to protect me if I get in a fight.

The right to vote is especially dear
And guarantees me liberties so I can live in this country with no fear.

Slavery is gone. HIP-HIP-HOORAY!!
I share my friendship with those of all colors and creeds today.

As I grow older, I will pay income tax, but that's okay.
It's my responsibility to help our government pay its way.

My home is safe from search and seizures
So I can enjoy this country's leisure.

We the people have our justice and tranquility
Balanced by our responsibility.

Happy Bicentennial, dear Constitution.
Thank you for making our America a great institution.

Love and pride forever,
Christopher Smith

Ruth Margaret Spjeldvik
Wasatch Elementary School
Ogden, Utah

Grade: 5
Teacher: Sofie Hamilton

The Constitution means freedom for me and for our country. Freedom allows us to do anything we want, except when our actions cut into other people's freedoms or rights.

Rights are an important part of the freedoms that the Constitution gives us. But with rights there come responsibilities. Responsibilities are important. If we had no responsibilities we would not be able to enjoy our freedoms and rights.

I lived the first few years of my life in West Germany. There, people do not have as much freedom as we have in America. For example, if you move, you have to go to the police station and tell the police where you are living. There are some countries where you cannot move where you want to move. The government assigns where you are to live.

Our forefathers came to America seeking freedom: freedom of religion, freedom of how and where to live, and the same kinds of freedoms for their children. The Constitution guarantees us these freedoms. The Constitution guarantees our children a bright future. The Constitution is what makes America great.

John Patrick Sproull
Montana Street
Elementary School
Dothan, Alabama

Grade: 5
Teacher: Mary Ann Henig

Dear Benjamin Franklin,

I have been studying the Constitution of the United States, and thought I would write to you about it. I didn't realize how much we take for granted–our rights and freedom.

Two hundred years ago, you and other men wrote the Constitution of the United States. It is now 1987. The Constitution has held up through wars and depression, and we have become one of the strongest nations in the world today. I feel we are the best country because of our rights and freedom.

The freedom of speech, the freedom of press, freedom of religion, the right to vote, and even the right to a fair trial, were the laws you wrote in 1787 and are still the laws today.

It would be difficult to live in another country without these rights.

There have been more amendments added. You can vote at 18 years old, it doesn't matter what color you are, and all women can vote. I feel these amendments are good. As long as the majority of the people want to add an amendment to the Constitution, "We the People" will vote on it. We are lucky to have these rights.

I would just like to thank you and the other men, for all you have done for me, my country, for . . . "We the People."

Your friend,
Johnny Sproull

P.S. You know the kite and key? My parents' electric bill was $200 this month!

Brad A. Stevenson Grade: 6
St. Mark Catholic School Teacher: Nancy Olson
Seattle, Washington

The Constitution is made up of articles which are made up of sections. Each section contains a law or statement. The Constitution was made in order to form a better country. The Constitution was written in 1787 in Independence Hall in Philadelphia and was signed on March 4, 1789 by around 40 people. These men were all representatives from different states. Two of the men who signed the Constitution were George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. These people were concerned with establishing a new and free country for many generations to come.

"We the People" are the words which begin the Constitution. The beginning words are not we the government or we the rulers of this country. This shows that in the United States we are all equal and just because the government makes important decisions for the citizens of the United States, it does not run our individual lives for us. The government of the United States does not decide whether one person will be a farmer or a computer technician; the person makes that decision for himself.

To me the Constitution of the United States means having freedom. Having the right to be able to speak when we want and where we want. It gives us the right to worship in the religion of our choice and go to the school of our choice. The Constitution gives us the freedom to vote once over the age of 18, and the right to choose our own job or career.

We must never take these freedoms for granted or forget how lucky we are as citizens of the United States to have the freedom of choice. Unfortunately, other countries are not as lucky as we are and do not have all these freedoms. There is a great responsibility behind making a choice. We should thank our forefathers for having the opportunity to accept these responsibilities.

The Constitution may be just a piece of paper to some people, but to me it is a part of my everyday life. Without it, I might not be going to the school that I am and wouldn't have the same friends that I do. I might not be part of the same religion and I might not even be living in the same house. The Constitution is one of the most important documents in United States history.

Jennifer Jane Stewart
New Berlin Center
New Berlin, Wisconsin

Grade: 5
Teacher: Jo Ann Nadeau

The Constitution of the United States gives us a government "Of the People, By the People, and For the People." It is the law of the land–the principles we live by. It means we have freedom and guarantees to basic human rights. It means we can feel safe in our daily life. Many countries aren't so lucky.

The Constitution means a lot to me. It means that "WE THE PEOPLE" or "I THE PERSON"

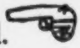
- have the right to go to any church, on any street, in any town, or pray out loud in any religion–and not be afraid.

- have the right to disagree with the Mayor, or a policeman, or even the President–and not be afraid.
- have the right to join any club or organization, or attend any meetings–and not be afraid.
- have the right to read what I want, when I want–and not be afraid.

- have the right to move to any state and live in any house, and feel safe in my house–and not be afraid.
- have the right to vote for whom I want (when I'm old enough)–and not be afraid.
- have the right to try to change laws–and not be afraid.
- have the right not to be put in jail for no reason, and to have a lawyer help me–and not be afraid.

- have the right to life, liberty, and happiness—and not be afraid.

- have the right to be protected by the law—and not be afraid.

- have the right to own my own gun—and not be afraid. 

- have the right to have all the guaranteed rights of any citizen of the United States, no matter what my color, race, creed, or sex—and not be afraid.

The U.S. Constitution has stood the test of time for 200 years. It has seen war, depression, and challenges, but it has continued to guarantee me my freedom by preserving, protecting, and defending these rights that all of those men fought for so long ago.

I am one small voice in this big country of ours, but I have the right to be heard and to live free from fear. Our Constitution guarantees me these rights—and you, too!

Michael Swartz
Seven Sorrows of the B.V.M. School
Middletown, Pennsylvania

Grade: 5
Teacher: Deborah Faul

I came home from school one day, and told my parents we had to write an essay on the Constitution. They said we should try an experiment.

First, they took the books away they felt I shouldn't read. Then, they wouldn't let me watch certain television shows. They told me I had to do certain chores. If I said I wanted to do the dishes, and they wanted me to do something else, I had to do as they wished. When we ate dinner, they had my favorite food, but made me eat something else. They took away the toys they didn't want me to play with. I was accused of doing something I didn't do, and I wasn't allowed to defend myself, or prove my innocence. My punishment was to go to my room for a certain amount of time. I could only say what they would allow me to say.

After doing this for 2 or 3 hours, I started to feel depressed, sad, and a little scared. I started to think what my life would be like if I didn't have the rights or freedoms given to me by the Constitution. Even though we have talked about and studied the Constitution in school, this experiment allowed me to experience, firsthand, what it would be like to live without the freedoms and protection we are given by the Constitution.

For the first time, I thought about the vision, caring, and love that our forefathers must have had when they drafted the Constitution. They had the foresight to ensure that future generations of Americans would have the rights, protection, and freedoms that were denied them in the countries they were forced to leave.

Today, we the people have the right to stand, shoulder to shoulder, as equal to anyone. We have the right to express our thoughts, and stand up for what we believe is right. We can elect people we believe will govern us, the way we feel we should be governed.

The two most important gifts given to me by the Constitution are: the right for me to express myself as an individual and the freedom to go as far as my dreams and visions will take me.

Monica Thakar
Mossy Oaks Elementary School
Beaufort, South Carolina

Grade: 6
Teacher: Gambrell G. Foster

Has anyone recently told you to move out of your house because an official of the government likes your house and wants to move into it? Or has anyone told you what profession you will have when you grow up, or has anyone told you to go to jail for no reason? If someone has, you must have been in another country because our Constitution will not allow it. When our founding fathers signed this historic document 200 years ago, they wanted us to have freedoms and be able to do things other countries did not have the privilege to do.

The Constitution of the United States is a promising document that will never change unless the people want it to. We add new bills to the Constitution to take care of our needs for today. Our Constitution gives us more freedoms and rights than other constitutions around the world. That is why ours is so unique.

I am glad I live now and not before the Constitution of the United States was written. Because now my family and I can do so many things that we could not have done before it was written. We can own guns if we are threatened, and we can protest about what we think is right. Our television is not censored, and the government does not read our mail. We can go to any church we want to, and we are informed about anything in our government that is not top secret. We can pick out the people we want to serve us in government, and when the next voting period comes, we can vote for other people if we do not like their policies.

The Constitution also means liberty. As long as I am doing something legal, no one will ask questions about it. But if I am accused of something, like a murder, and I have not done anything, I have the right to a fair trial. I also have the right to due process, which tells me my rights as a citizen of the United States of America. During a war, the government cannot tell us to board soldiers and pay for their meals unless I say so.

I love this country and the freedoms that come with it. Many people around the world would love to come here and live. Some countries do not tell their citizens what happens in their country. They only tell good things so the citizens will be satisfied. But our government tells us what happens, good or bad. We might be mad because of the bad things, but we will be glad that they told us in the end. Our country was devised to run on people power. We have a great nation built on a great set of laws. And as long as we have the Constitution of the United States with us, we will keep on having the wonderful country we live in.

Sarah Thomas
Ellis Elementary School
Chubbuck, Idaho

Grade: 6
Teacher: Marg Griffin

To me, the Constitution means freedom! Freedom to say what I want, freedom to write what I want, freedom to choose my own religion. Those are our rights – stated clearly in our Constitution.

To me, the Constitution means fairness. Fairness that means if you think something is not right, you can change it. Fairness that means if you are arrested, you have the right to have a trial by jury. Fairness that means we try to treat all people equally no matter what their color, sex, or religion. Fairness that means we can choose our own leaders which show our country is truly "ruled by the people."

To our country, the Constitution means cooperation. Cooperation that means three parts of government – judicial, legislative, and executive – all working together to keep our democracy running. The three parts cooperate in another way – each one watches the others. That way, they keep any branch from getting too strong and misusing its powers. Good idea, isn't it?

To our country the Constitution means a strong nation. Our nation is strong because we have the support of our people. Americans are proud of their country and they support most of our laws. But any laws the people do not support can be changed. That is another thing that is wonderful about America.

To sum it up, the United States Constitution means, to me at least, freedom, fairness, cooperation, and a strong nation. Those are the things that will give us a brighter future.

Aaron "Seth" Turnbow Grade: 6
Karns Middle School Teacher: Ina Stanaland
Knoxville, Tennessee

Writing this essay sounded like a very boring assignment because I did not think the Constitution meant anything to me since I did not think I used it very much. However, after I thought about it, I realized that I do not use it for adult purposes like paying taxes, voting, serving on a jury, or getting involved in political issues, but I do use the right to assemble every time I go to Scouts, 4-H, or basketball games which are activities that matter to me. When I am at school, I use textbooks that present several views and have not been edited by the government. I have teachers who are teaching because they were free to choose teaching careers, not because they were forced to. Even when I am at home goofing off, I can turn on the radio or TV and choose from several stations or channels, not just one or two run by the government, because we have freedom of speech and press. My parents may not let me choose my own church the way I choose my radio stations, but at least we can choose as a family to go to the church we want.

I realize the views I have on the Constitution and the ways I use it will change as I get older, but that doesn't mean that the ways I use it now are not important. It just means that the Constitution works regardless of my age.

What is liberty? The power of governing yourselves. If you adopt this constitution, have you this power?

James Lincoln, Antifederalist

Jennifer VanOoteghem Grade: 5
Reese Middle School Teacher: Connie Richnak
Reese, Michigan

The Constitution means that the people who formed this country wanted to give us as Americans the choices they may not have had in the lands they came from. They realized from their past histories and their countries that without the freedom to live where they choose, say their opinions, and worship as they wish, that the new country they formed would not succeed.

As we watch the news and read the newspapers about the people in South Africa who are forced to leave their homes and villages because the government decides the land is needed for whatever they decide, I realize how lucky we are to have the Constitution that forbids this from happening to us.

When the space shuttle blew up, because of our Constitution, which created freedom of the press and freedom of speech, we as American citizens, as well as the world, heard within minutes of the tragedy. In countries such as Russia, where the nuclear accident at the Chernobyl power station was not reported because they do not have this freedom, it took their own people days, and other countries weeks, to find out about it, which endangered many lives.

In everything we do in our daily lives – walking down a street, going to school, working where we want, and worshipping as we wish – all come to us through our Constitution and the rights it gave us as free citizens. If more countries only realized how important it is to have a constitution like ours, then we would have a much more peaceful world to live in.

Whitney Voeltz
Ferry Pass Elementary School
Pensacola, Florida

Grade: 5
Teacher: Jo Ann Cawley

When I was nine, my family took a trip to Philadelphia. While touring Independence Hall, I went into the room where our Constitution was written. As I gazed up at the chair where George Washington once sat, the doors flew open and some men said, "You must leave this building at once! There will be no more meetings here."

As our parents were loaded on a bus to be taken to their jobs, we children were told there would be no more schools. As we started to smile, the man said, "The new dictator says that you will work in the factories instead." I started to speak up against this and was told, "There is no freedom of speech now."

I told the boy next to me that I was glad tomorrow was Sunday and that we could go to church instead of work. The man heard me and said, "There is no church. It's just another workday."

"America is a place where people have choices, rights, and can make their own decisions," I said. I realized that I was being told that everything which the United States Constitution had provided would be taken away.

The man began to shake me and told me not to talk about these freedoms. As he shook me harder, someone said, "Whitney, wake up! You have been daydreaming. It's time to go on with the tour of Independence Hall." I was so glad that our Constitution prevents this kind of thing from happening.

Dee Wallwey
Emerson-Hubbard
Community School
Emerson, Nebraska

Grade: 6
Teacher: Doris Hollman

The Constitution means to me a governmental system to ensure my rights. After the Revolution, it became clear that men could not rule themselves without some formal instrument of government and a genuine national crisis drove the founders to assemble in a Constitutional Convention. The result of this epic meeting was the Constitution of the United States.

After many decades of amending and refining the basic document, the United States Constitution still guides the American people. Its overall wisdom still endures.

The Constitution means to me a law that can secure the future for generations to come. It keeps all people equal under its rule and provides its children with the education they need to become whatever they want to be. The Constitution allows people to exceed their potential ability and go beyond to help other people. It gives liberty to peoples of all colors and origins, sexes, and ages.

This great document stands for freedom and justice. It has been the model for free governments throughout the world, for state constitutions, and for the United Nations charter. It has survived financial crisis, revolts, a civil war, and the constant attacks of political extremists. If the human rights it was designed to protect are ever lost, it will not be because the Constitution has failed America, but because Americans have failed the precious heritage given to them by the men who argued and sweltered and worried during the long, hot summer months of 1787.

Shane Yunker
Washington Elementary School
Madison, South Dakota

Grade: 5
Teacher: Arlin Hanson

As one of "we the people" I am grateful I was born an American because America is an extraordinary country with a remarkable government. I am proud of those famous men, who, during a hot summer in 1787, drafted what is now the oldest and one of the most successful plans of government in the world, and wrote it so that we the people can rule.

We, the people, have a form of government where the governing power is split between three branches and each has certain powers so no one can become too powerful.

We, the people, have personal freedoms of speech, press, religion, and assembly.

I am grateful that I live in a country that insures liberties that people from different countries don't have.

Although it is not a voluminous document, the Constitution covers a governing plan, using separation of powers to protect the rights of we, the people.

Sometimes we, the people, take the Constitution for granted and perhaps don't vote or misuse our liberty.

We need to study the Constitution and know why it was written for us and our posterity.

One of America's weaknesses lies in our not accepting the responsibility of upholding the great government we have. But as one of we, the people, I will do my best to work to help our country remain a democracy where we, the people, can rule.

For over two centuries, the United States Constitution has. . .expressed the hopes, dreams and desires of each citizen,. . .and the human rights it guarantees have been upheld.

GRADES 7 & 8

John Scott Armstrong Grade: 8
Jackson Christian School Teacher: Donna Armstrong
Jackson, Tennessee

A 17-year-old boy sits behind locked doors and closed windows doing what he loves–playing the violin. Outside, he hears a knock at the door. Quickly, he hides his instrument and nervously answers the door. At the door is a government official telling him to report to his school for his class on engineering, a career that has been determined by the government. Although he loves music and it is his lifelong dream to play in an orchestra, he is forced into a career of engineering because of his high grade on an assigned government math examination.

Without the Constitution, this is one of many things that could happen in America, but because of the Constitution, we have the right to choose the career we want. Because of the long hours our forefathers put into writing this document, we enjoy freedoms that people in other countries don't have. Our Constitution is the foundation of freedom in this great country. It gives us freedoms that many people in our country take for granted. Many abuse the freedoms that others have risked their lives to gain. If we don't take care of our freedoms, we might wake up one day and find them gone. I don't know what the Constitution means to others, but it means "American Freedom" to me. That's what it should mean to all Americans.

Vikki Basilico Grade: 7
N.A. Ferri Middle School Teacher: Janice Cahir
Johnston, Rhode Island

In one country, a man is jailed for speaking out against the government. In another, a man is arrested for robbery. Although he never committed the crime, he is thrown in prison with no guarantee of a fair trial. Somewhere else, a family is caught trying to escape across the border. They are shot immediately.

Are these scenes from high-action adventure movies? Unfortunately, the answer is they are not. They are real scenes taken from the evening news. Many countries do not have the freedoms we enjoy in the United States. In Communist countries, for example, the people have few of the privileges guaranteed to us as our rights by the Constitution. The above incidents could never happen to even the poorest of American citizens.

One of the amendments to the Constitution which I consider to be very important is the first, which guarantees freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. Did you ever read an editorial in a newspaper? It is an excellent example of free press. Other means of communication such as television and radio are also important. They have to be kept free from domination by any particular political party or group so that they will work for all of us.

As citizens and future leaders of our country, we must understand our Constitution so that we can bring it into the next century, amending it if necessary, but never destroying the basic concepts of a free, democratic country.

Jenni Bradley
Tri-North Middle School
Bloomington, Indiana

Grade: 8
Teacher: James S. Weimer

In studying the Constitution, I find three things that mean a lot to me. First, our rights as U.S. citizens are spelled out and protected. Second, our responsibilities are strongly implied. And finally, both our rights and our responsibilities present opportunities for each of us as people who live in a free and democratic country.

The Constitution specifies many rights, but for me, the most important are: the right to worship, the right to express my views, and the right to be viewed as equal to every other person. Thus, I can go to any church and worship as I please. No one can tell me what to believe. I can express my ideas without being punished. I am free to write an editorial criticizing anyone from Bobby Knight to President Reagan! Finally, no one can legally discriminate against me because of my race, my sex, or my age.

Our responsibilities are equally important. Only I am responsible for the decisions I make. I must obey the law. Laws can be challenged and changed, but doing so takes time and patience. As I speak my mind, I must respect others' feelings, giving them the same chance to say what they think. If I am to be treated fairly, I must treat others justly, even if they choose a different lifestyle or hold political views that I feel are wrong.

Some have called America "the land of opportunity." Our Constitution has made that opportunity real for us all.

Melinda Burns
Guest Junior High School
Roseville, Michigan

Grade: 8
Teacher: Betty R. Graff

Dear Anna,

How are you? I am just fine except for a little guilt I'm feeling. You know, it's funny, here I am living in the U.S.A., and I never even read our Constitution until today in Social Studies class. I never realized how great it really is! I always thought that saying what you feel, making your own decisions, and things like that were something everyone did. They're not! But then of course, you already know that! There are a lot of things I don't understand, but I know that the Constitution establishes the form of government and guarantees the rights and liberties of the people. I have enjoyed these liberties but never really thought of them as part of a design that has made this country a model of freedom.

As I was walking home thinking about everything I learned today, I noticed familiar things now looked different to me. I passed my church, Jay's synagogue, Tony's newstand, the local courthouse, and the elementary school playground filled with children of every ethnic background. These everyday sights symbolized what the Constitution stands for – the unity and the freedom of the people.

There are many complicated articles, amendments, and additions to the Constitution, but I think what impresses me the most is the writers' original resolve to establish a government that belongs to the people. People like me – and maybe someday people like you!

Your U.S. Pen Pal,
Melinda Burns

Denise Yvonne Burton
Kate Griffin Junior High School
Meridian, Mississippi

Grade: 8
Teacher: Howard Hagwood

To me, a black American, the U.S. Constitution means that unlike my forefathers, I will never be considered part person and part property as was sanctioned by the "Three-Fifths Compromise" of the Constitution. It means that I have escaped the chains of bondage that bound thousands to servitude.

To our country, the Constitution means a better place in which to live. It means living in a country that recognizes the dignity of all its people.

To me, the Constitution means that I have a country to call my own, unlike thousands of blacks who were constitutionally freed by the Thirteenth Amendment, but who were people without a country until the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. It means that I have voting rights which were not granted to blacks until 83 years after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

To our country, the Constitution means recognition of the diversity and involvement of all people living within the confines of our great nation.

To me and to our country, the Constitution has set the course for all Americans to live in peace and in tranquility. Now, when I, a black American, pledge my allegiance to our U.S. Flag, I can be proud to say that I am a citizen of this great country. When I hear the lyrics of *America*, "Let freedom ring!" I can indeed say that because of the U.S. Constitution freedom has rung!

Ashley Dyan Carlisle Grade: 8
Ridgeview Middle School Teacher: Sherri Gonzalez
Orange Park, Florida

For over two centuries the United States Constitution has most accurately expressed the hopes, dreams and desires of each citizen of the United States and the human rights it guarantees have been upheld. It is a timeless document which has lasted through America's eras and stages of development, continuing in consistency, providing for the well-being of every American. I have the security of the Constitution's provision for my fellow citizens and me, just as my ancestors were protected. The Constitution is a symbol of the strength and backbone of our nation. It allows us the freedom to excel and soar above and is our nation's power source. No, it is not just a rustic document with pages yellowed and crumbling with age for us to remember, but it is still living and active in our lives. My appreciation for the Constitution goes beyond its literary composition, symbolic importance and the application of its resources. I find it awe-inspiring to attempt to comprehend the ageless quality it possesses and the amazing accuracy and practicality of the writers. I am eternally thankful for the document shaped by God-fearing forefathers so long ago, for it continues to shape the lives of millions today. Through changes and circumstances, through war and peace, the Constitution has been faithful and dependable, and for that we will always cherish it.

We are either a United people or we are not.... For whilst we are playing---a game between the two we shall never be consistent or respectable---

George Washington, November 1785

Marcela del Mar Raskosky Chamorro
Colegio Maya
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Grade: 7
Teacher: Susan Small

The United States has given the world a model by way of the Constitution: A document so rich in wisdom that has made the United States the yardstick of freedom and liberty for all.

In most countries of the free world there exist three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial), yet in no country but the United States have I seen the Judicial's highest echelon, the Supreme Court, really trying to interpret the Founding Fathers' basic laws, the Constitution.

It really impresses me that a document written more than 200 years ago could be so respected by its citizens and observed by the authorities. This is the way it should be, otherwise the Constitution would have no value. It was envisioned as the rights for all of its people and these same people, generation after generation, have made it the most respected set of laws that any person may have.

People from all countries have migrated to this great nation, captivated by its freedom and liberty for all. This inflow of people with different languages and beliefs was something that the Founding Fathers did not probably think of. Yet, it is one of the Constitution's greatest achievements, because without these people and their rich cultures, the United States would not be as great as it is today.

I congratulate the people of the United States for the vision of their Founding Fathers and their continuous support for its Constitution. The world is richer for it. I pray to God that someday my country will follow the lesson in democracy that the United States has given us. I would like to thank them for this valuable lesson which the whole world will never forget.

Kathleen Clancy Grade: 8
Royal Palm Junior High School Teacher: Carla R. Stein
Phoenix, Arizona

The half sun on the back of General George Washington's chair was an unusual detail at the scene. The men were clustered around the table, their eyes sunken in deep thought, and their bodies tense with concentration. A slight glance into the men's eyes, and you could see what was in there–the yearning for a country bound in freedom, with justice for all men. At this scene, the Constitution of the United States was created, and thus guaranteed freedom, justice, and equality for all people.

At the "Constitutional Convention," our nation's policies were made by our Founding Fathers. They understood not only the past and present, but the future as well, as is proven by our Constitution. In the United States, *all* people are free. To me, the United States Constitution sets forth the freedoms I was born with into unbreakable glass; it preserves them where no one can take them away.

Freedom is extremely important to me–the freedom to speak my feelings, to let them be acknowledged, to worship as I please, to live where and how I want, and to know that how I feel about the government and our leaders will not jeopardize my freedom. The United States Constitution guarantees that I am allowed to be myself.

In our country, the United States Constitution is a symbol of justice, as well as freedom. All citizens are assured of a fair and unbiased trial. If a citizen is accused of a crime, and accused unjustly, because of our Constitution, Americans have the opportunity to be freed of the accusation, and once again, live a normal life. Because of the Supreme Court created by our Founding Fathers, decisions affecting all people are carefully pondered over and judiciously decided.

The United States Constitution represents freedom, equality, and justice to individuals in our country, as well as to all citizens. Its laws are the basis of our democracy.

Meredith Cunningham
Minonk-Dana-Rutland
Junior/Senior High
School
Minonk, Illinois

Grade: 8
Teacher: Judith Bennington

Yesterday, I went shopping at a mall. I ate in a fast food restaurant and went to a movie. As we drove home, I heard the radio announcer talking about people in other countries who were risking their lives to come to the United States because they did not agree with the government in their own country.

Listening to the announcer interview one of those people, I began to realize how lucky I am. I thought about the things I had done that afternoon–the shopping, the food, and the movie. I chose what I wanted to buy from a large variety of products in many different stores. The restaurant had plenty of inexpensive food. No one stopped me from attending the movie. I decided I am lucky to live in a country which has a constitution which allows me the freedom to do all those things. I realized that even though I hear people gripe about the taxes, most people respect the government that is set up under our Constitution. They have good reasons to respect it, too. That Constitution allows us the freedom to own and operate businesses, make choices about how and where we live, and live without fear. It guarantees us the right to govern ourselves and to live with respect for each other.

The man I heard on the radio had left his own country because conditions there were bad. He did not seem to respect that country's government. In this country, anyone who studies our Constitution should realize, as I do now, that it is easy to respect our Constitution because it lets us respect ourselves.

'Tis true–times are dull–money is scarce–but these difficulties will certainly be removed as soon as the States become united in one head...

The New Hampshire *Spy*, 1787

Agnes de la Vega
Martin Luther King Intermediate School
Hayward, California
Grade: 8
Teacher: Mary Anne Freitas

The world is built of many independent nations, big and small, some with no freedom at all. The people cannot express themselves, say what they feel, or do as they please. People are mistreated in their own community. Here, in the U.S., it is the people who create and implement the freedom of our country. This freedom we take for granted.

When I was a young child, I never realized what a deep privilege it was to be living in a free country. I finally opened my eyes and looked around the world that had blossomed about me and said, "Hey, I'm free!" And because I was born in this country, I still feel that way everyday.

There is a document in the United States that our founding fathers decided to call "the Constitution." It states the basic principles and laws of our nation, determines the powers and duties of the government, and guarantees certain rights to the people in it. But what is its true value and power? It is more than a mere one-sentence statement. It holds our dreams and wishes. What we can and cannot do. It gave women and 18-year-olds the right to vote, established freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The Constitution guides our everyday lives. It gives us the right to choose our religion, careers, where we want to live, and who we want to be. Because it works so well for us, many countries have based their constitutions on ours. We set a precedent for other nations. These countries hope that they too can follow along our path to freedom and equal rights.

I honor the Constitution for its dignity and grace. It displays and declares that this is how we envision life in the United States to be. It is not just "scrolls of old paper." It is a unity of people.

Forde Fairchild Grade: 7
Terril Community School Teacher: Greg Stevens
Terril, Iowa

The Constitution. It's more than 14 pages of paper. It's the dreams of the Irish and all the immigrants as they came to America on crowded, rat-infested ships. It's the sweat of the cowhands on the old range. It's the Indians' tears as they were being forced off their land; it's all of us, you and me.

Our rights and freedoms are sometimes taken for granted, but what would it be like without them? Freedom in America is what brought people here so long ago and still does today. The Constitution guaranteed me a chance to be all that I can be. I can go just as far as my talents will take me. In this country I can go to any church I want to. If I'm Lutheran, I can practice that faith in the same way a Jew or Moslem can.

Our country is one of the few in which a leader's death does not cause chaos. Why is this? It is because of those 14 pages of paper, our Constitution, which provides for a peaceful transition of power. This is one thing that makes our country great.

Where but in America can people openly criticize the government? From a group of colonies to a confederation, and even now that we are the greatest democracy in the world, we have always been able to speak our minds. I have a right to express my opinions on any subject. An example of this is that I can write to the editor of the *Des Moines Register* without fear of reprisal of any kind. The Constitution assures me that I have a right to be secure in my person, my papers, and my property.

If I should ever be accused of a crime, I would have a right to a trial by jury of my peers, instead of being subjected to a witch hunt.

All these freedoms and rights are provided for in those 14 pages of paper, which govern the greatest democracy on the Earth.

Jennifer Finegold Grade: 7
Yorktown Middle School Teacher: Elaine Warren
Columbus, Ohio

The meaning of the Constitution for me, and therefore others, is embedded in my family's story.

One of the things the Constitution means to me is the realization of my great grandfather's dream. His dream was to live in a country free from persecution; free to live and worship as he pleased. To fulfill his dreams of freedom, he left his family in Russia, escaping by floating down a river on a raft of logs. He made his way to America where he was able to live happily, free from the terrible persecutions of his mother country.

The Constitution also means to me the sacrifice of my mother's family. They gave their lives so that the Constitution could be written. They were in Boston for the "tea party," they were at Valley Forge in the cold. They were at home waiting for husbands and sons who didn't return.

The Constitution also means a great uncle that I never knew. The son of a refugee from religious persecution, he died during the "Battle of the Bulge," defending his father's adopted country, defending the Constitution and freedom.

The Constitution also means my grandfather who limps painfully through life because of wounds received during WW II when he, too, as did his ancestors, fought to defend freedom.

The Constitution means both sides of my family giving of themselves, defending my right to freedom and hope. My family's legacy to me and my fellow citizens is the Constitution with its promises of freedom and hope.

I would assent to the lopping of this limb [arm] before I assent to the dissolution of the Union.

Edmund Randolph, 1788

Kirsten Giebutowski
Russell Elementary School
Rumney, New Hampshire
Grade: 8
Teacher: Rebecca Howard

The Constitution of the United States was written in 1787 by a group of remarkable people. It is this document that has shaped our government and kept our country together from the time it was written. To our country it is a priceless set of instructions for forming a system of government. To me, it is a statement of everything America stands for – most importantly, our freedoms of religion, speech, and the press.

I cannot imagine being forced to follow a certain religion. Because of freedom of religion, I am able to choose my own religion or not choose any at all.

Freedom of speech is also very important. If I was not able to voice my opinions, I think I would feel very bottled up inside. When I was younger, I wrote a letter to the President in which I described my thoughts on his performance. Without the Constitution I could have been punished for writing of my opinions since they may have gone against what the people in the government felt. Even constructive criticism would be a crime without the Constitution. We are very lucky that people are allowed to tell the government their opinions. The people have contributed many ideas that have helped the government greatly. I think that if the government allowed no opinions from the people, the country's success would be little. Without this right, all of these different viewpoints would be taken away and we would be left with a very limited amount of ideas.

Without freedom of the press we would be living in this country with a blindfold on. We would not know of anything the government did not want to tell us. Stories of danger and suffering would not reach our ears, and we would not be able to help solve these problems. Disasters, as with Chernobyl, could be unknown, and this could be dangerous for the people. Because of freedom of the press, I am able to pick up the newspaper or magazine and read of all that is happening in my country and the world. I think this is very important, and everyone has the right to be aware of what is happening in his or her own country.

I think the Constitution is something that makes everyone proud to be a part of America. It has even given hope to other countries in search of a better life. I am glad I am an American.

Jennifer Hagen
St. Mark's Catholic School
Seattle, Washington

Grade: 8
Teacher: Nancy M. Murphy

To me the Constitution is an open door. It's a doorway to a land of plenty. Refugees from Russia, Vietnam, Korea, South Africa, and thousands of immigrants from Europe fled here when life was unbearable where they were.

I am not a refugee from Colombia or San Salvador. I am not searching for religious freedom. I do not know what it feels like to be someone from any of these backgrounds.

I am an American. Born and raised in my precious homeland. I see America as a place of rest for many thousands who have had a long, hard journey.

My great-great-grandfather and grandmother came from Ireland. They wanted to raise their children and grandchildren in this great land that they had heard of for as long as they could remember. Happily, they succeeded in doing so.

I feel that when James Wilson read the Constitution for the first time many ages ago he was inviting my grandparents and many others to come to a country that had a unique government. This union of states was willing to take in the homeless and poor.

The Constitution is a way of life to me. It lets me do as I please and speak out and make my opinions heard. Also, it keeps me safe from the dangers that lurk in our world.

We don't have to come from a nation of sadness and cruelty to enjoy and appreciate the Constitution for what it is. But we must realize that without this great document our nation would not even exist.

Mary Ann Frances Hall
Lupelele Elementary School
Pago Pago, American Samoa

Grade: 8
Teacher: Roxanne K. Galeai

What the United States Constitution means to me and our country is that when I wake up in the morning, and smell the fresh air, I feel proud that I am American Samoan. I remember the time when my father showed us children a decorative certificate of citizenship from the United States. Being an American National, his desire was to become a full-fledged American citizen of the United States. On April 28, 1960 at a United States District Court in Honolulu, Hawaii, my father's dream came true. He became a naturalized citizen. My father is very proud of that certificate. His eyes fill with pride whenever he recalls that special day.

I can recall the time when my family went to the Pago Pago International Airport to see my brother James depart for basic training in the United States Army. He presently is serving his country and plans to make it his career. My father told us children of the many brave and good people who have given their lives so that we could enjoy the democracy of freedom under our United States Constitution. For me, I never will forget the sacrifices of so many.

How wonderful it is to live in a country where people have a choice to choose their lifestyle, their ways of living and to be what they want to be. I hope someday to become a doctor and to return to my country and help my people of American Samoa. I know our United States Constitution will be behind me all the way, and behind all those who try to make the United States Constitution work. How fortunate I am to be born a child of freedom. That's what the United States Constitution means to me and our country.

God Bless Freedom! and God bless America!!

Thank you.

Sandra Herrington-Wein
East Ridge Middle School
Ridgefield, Connecticut

Grade: 8
Teacher: Barbara Groves
Janie Larson

The meaning of the Constitution has become less important to us than what it does for us. We grow up secure in the knowledge that we have all manner of freedoms. When people, without stopping to think, fling statements around such as, "You can't make me be quiet. I've got freedom of speech," they are actually citing a constitutional right.

The privilege of settling disputes before a jury of fellow citizens assures Americans that they have a way of legally changing an unhappy situation. Whether in anger or in jest, we say, "I've got my rights. I could take this all the way to the Supreme Court." This line is used frequently without thought as to what it really means. We accept the fact that due process and the right to a fair and speedy trial are within the reach of any United States citizen.

When we peek out from under the umbrella we call our Constitution, we see that we are truly sheltered. The Constitution protects us against many problems we would not usually even think about, like censorship or injustice from our own government. This leaves us free to prosper and grow.

Our Constitution was so well written that it allows us to take our government for granted. I have begun to see, that unless we appreciate what the Constitution means, rather than just what it does for us, we could cease to enjoy the justice and liberty that the framers foresaw.

Matthew Holian
Millard Central Junior High School
Omaha, Nebraska
Grade: 8
Teacher: Mary Lykke

Buenos Días. Guten Tag. Bonjour. In any language. Hello. I am the Constitution of the United States. I was written to protect you, defend you, and assist you in your search for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For many foreign immigrants, I am an everlasting symbol of hope and democracy. But I am not saying this for those who trust me and believe in me. This is for any American citizen who thinks of me as a piece of paper, an ancient document written by old men long ago.

About 200 years ago, in 1787, I was written. Oh, I'm sure you've heard about it in your history class, but you probably didn't take any special interest. At the mention of my name, you may be puzzled, indifferent, or even bored. That is my most agonizing ache–your ignorance. You see, I stand for the past, the present, and the future. I ask of you one thing. Remember me. Remember your country, your government, and the education, security, and, most importantly, the freedom it has granted you. For all the men who have fought so bravely for my preservation, and died so heroically for our country, remember me. For every man, woman, and child who has ever been oppressed, but kept on in hope of a new, better life, remember me. For all the people who have been inspired in the truths I hold to be self-evident, remember me. For every courageous person who has fought valiantly for the rights of all, remember me. So when you hear my name, or discuss my impact on the nation, recall all the things I have done, regard me with respect, and I'll know that you remember me, the Constitution of the United States.

Jeff Jin
Vergennes Union High School
Vergennes, Vermont

Grade: 8
Teacher: Wayne Ramey

Have you ever stopped to think about the Constitution? What it means to our country? What it means to you? Imagine our country with another form of government like Communism. We wouldn't be able to elect our leaders or have so much freedom. Or take, for instance, apartheid. Blacks would be treated as lessers, and there would be many riots. It would seem like the period of time before the Civil War.

The Constitution separates federal powers and makes sure no one branch of government becomes superior. It's easy to explain what the Constitution means to the U.S., but to explain what it means to me is more difficult. What the Constitution means to each person individually is a matter of opinion. My opinion about the subject mainly deals with my Constitutional rights. I feel luckier in a way than schoolchildren in Russia or South Africa. My freedom is what I think is really important. There are so many opportunities open to all the citizens of this great land.

Many nations have made constitutions similar to ours because of its success. The U.S. Constitution at 200 years old, is the world's oldest Constitution that's still being used in this day and age. The Philippines passed a new constitution proposed by Corazon Aquino. It's modeled after ours.

One of the best things about our Constitution is its adaptability. It can be changed by adding amendments and the elastic clause. Amendments and the elastic clause can only be added or used when something necessary needs to be changed. They allow us to correct injustices of the past. An example of this is after the Civil War. The government had to make a law to ban slavery. They added an amendment which guaranteed the citizenship of all blacks. It prevented slavery and gave slaves rights. Because of all it does, the Constitution is important to us all.

David Joseph
Our Lady of Prompt Succor School
Alexandria, Louisiana

Grade: 8
Teacher: Michèle O. Fontenot

When I think of our country, I am reminded of a beautiful fabric made up of free people of all colors and creeds. The most noticeable quality of this fabric is a golden thread that bonds the fibers of the fabric together. The golden thread represents the United States Constitution, which is very precious like gold and has retained its value through time.

In 1787, exactly 200 years ago, America's best and brightest leaders spun this magnificent golden thread called the United States Constitution. The golden thread was woven into the fabric of our country, creating an embroidered masterpiece of democracy.

Through the years, as the fabric of America grew larger and more diverse, the golden thread was stretched in many different directions to accommodate the fabric. Even when the fabric became bloodstained, torn, and frayed, the golden thread would not break under the stress. It held our country together with continuous strands of limited government, popular sovereignty, and rule by law.

What the United States Constitution means to me and to our country is that as the fabric of our nation grows and changes, the Constitution, like a golden thread, will always be strong yet flexible enough to bond the people of America together with the freedom of democracy.

Lisa Karpeles Grade: 7
Sephardic Hebrew Academy Teacher: Greg Gutstein
Los Angeles, California

The United States Constitution grants citizens many sacred rights. Among these guarantees is the right to practice the religious beliefs of one's own choosing. It also guarantees its citizens the right to be safe in their own home from illegal searches and seizures, the freedom of speech, and the right to the pursuit of happiness, so long as it doesn't hurt the rights of others.

My grandparents came from a country that had none of these guarantees. Because they did not have these guarantees it was easy for their government to do to them most anything they wanted. If they wanted to pray either standing up or kneeling down, their government could punish them for not practicing their religion the way the government wanted. If their government wanted to search their house or take away their property, they needed nothing more than the desire to do so. Not in the U.S.A.

In the United States of America, the Constitution provides many safeguards to ensure that the religion I choose to practice, the property I own, and most of the things I choose to say are protected.

The Constitution further guarantees equal protection of the law to all of its citizens, whether black, Christian, white, or Jewish. What this means is that if the penalty for stealing an apple is 1 year in jail for a white man, then the penalty for stealing an apple if you're a black, Christian, or Jew is also 1 year in jail. Although all of the rights above are guaranteed by the Constitution we must never lose sight of the fact that what is guaranteed is not carved in stone, and we must forever be on guard to be willing to sacrifice all to protect its continuation at all costs.

Stephen G. Klezaras Grade: 8
Gunning Bedford Middle School Teacher: Charles Eurich
Delaware City, Delaware

The Constitution means freedom to me. It means that under the law, I am equal to everyone else in America. It protects me from unlawful prosecution. It gives me the right to pray at the church of my choice, not a predetermined one. I can read the books and newspapers of my choice. I can elect the person who I think is most qualified to represent me in Congress. I can elect the leaders of my local government. I can also speak out against any law or policy that these same leaders should enact, with which I disagree, without fear of persecution. I have the right to defend my family, friends, and myself if the situation arises.

The Constitution also means that I cannot just sit back and take all these rights for granted. As a citizen of this country, I have certain responsibilities to my government. When the time comes, I will register to vote: only through this process can I be sure that I have a voice in my government. I will register for the draft, for this will assure the defense of my government. I will pay taxes, for this is a small price to pay for our freedom.

The Constitution has provided these freedoms for the past 200 years. It has withstood many political storms as well as a civil war. It is a symbol of what man can accomplish with common sense, compassion, and compromise. The Constitution will play a great role in my life, even if I choose to take it for granted, it will be there protecting me.

Kim Lee Laudan
Lowrey Junior
High School
Dearborn, Michigan

Grade: 8
Teacher: Karen Knisely

"Freedom" is the one word that expresses how I feel, and is a word not known to other less fortunate countries. Our forefathers fought for the Constitution and for what they believed in, so that future generations would not suffer the hardships they encountered, so that America would be free.

My mother was from Vietnam. Vietnam never knew freedom. The dreams and hopes of her childhood were things I had grown up with and had taken for granted. She was faced with war and suffering and was filled with shattered hopes that would never be fulfilled, until she came to America. Only here in the land of the free could she experience what she never had as a child.

The Constitution should be, not just to me but to everyone, a treasure that we should be proud of, and realize just how very blessed we are to live in a free land. To think of the countries that are ruled by poverty and stricken with grief puts a pain in my soul, because my ancestors, who are a part of me, struggled and tried to make a life out of what little they had. It is now all worth it, for the Constitution has given to us and future generations the justice and liberty they had strived for. If it were not for the Constitution we would be living the same kind of horror many countries face today. The Constitution is the guaranteed promise that we will always be free.

Geoffrey MacArthur
St. Mary Magdalen School
Wilmington, Delaware

Grade: 8
Teacher: Sister Marie John

The Constitution of the United States is one of the most significant documents in American history. Many other countries have tried to model their constitutions after ours. But the reason that the United States Constitution is so monumental is the first three words, "We the People . . ." We the people tell the government what it can and cannot do.

The Constitution was written by men who were the founding fathers of our nation and who knew the fundamental privileges for which they had fought the British.

Even though many think that the Constitution is unimportant to young people, it protects all United States citizens. It states that I, and the other citizens of the United States, have the right to choose the leaders in the government. I think that this is an especially critical part of the Constitution because it is a privilege that many people in other countries cannot enjoy.

The first amendment is particularly important because it declares that the government shall have nothing to do with the religion that I want to follow. It also permits me to speak my mind, even if it is against the government. Another critical part of the first article is the freedom of the press. This is considerable because it allows me to hear others' views, in addition to the opinions that the leaders of this country want me to hear.

Another key part of the United States Constitution is the foresight of our founding fathers. They created the Constitution so that changes could be made at any time if they are essential and in the best interest of the people. A good example of this is amendment eighteen, Prohibition, and amendment twenty-one, the withdrawal of it. Another example is amendment nineteen, dealing with equal rights for women, and amendment fifteen, stating that rights will not be denied on account of race or color.

The Constitution is a living document always growing and open to change. Because of this flexibility it has lived to its 200th birthday and remains a valuable guideline for modern times.

Reuven Mohl
Yeshiva of Manhattan Beach
Brooklyn, New York

Grade: 7
Teacher: Barbara J. Cowan

For the past 8 years I have been attending an elementary school near Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York. Many Russian immigrants have settled in this area and as a result, several have become my classmates and close friends.

My school teaches religion, and I enjoy observing all the Jewish holidays. My Russian friends tell me that they were not permitted to learn about their heritage, celebrate holidays, or attend houses of worship. They weren't able to express their feelings and emotions. Their futures and professional goals were determined by the government.

I grew up taking for granted the freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution. I have learned that the Constitution of my country is not only a document to be studied but a way of life to be appreciated. How fortunate I am that I live in a country that protects my basic freedoms. The United States government consists of three branches that check and balance each other. No part of the government can become too powerful or take these rights away from me and my fellow Americans.

I now have a better understanding of the Constitution and the importance given to its construction by our country's leaders.

This year America will be celebrating the Constitution's 200th anniversary. The honors and respect given to this historical document are well deserved.

Hoa Nguyen
Kalakaua Intermediate School
Honolulu, Hawaii
Grade: 8
Teacher: Sandra Maruyama

If only Vietnam could be like America! Many immigrant families like mine left Vietnam. We escaped for freedom in America. Our lives were endangered, but we felt it was important.

I am happy to be in America especially when I think about what life was like back in Vietnam. Life was miserable because the government controlled our lives. Every day I had to work for the government after school by picking up rubbish from the street and turning it in for recycling. We had to go to meetings to learn the way of communism.

Living in America is very different. In America the government does not force its people to do anything because of the basic rights granted to us by the Constitution. I can pursue the things I want to do.

In school I can voice my opinion freely because of the first amendment which includes the Freedom of Speech. I have the opportunity to vote for people who I feel are the best candidates because of the twenty-sixth amendment which is the Right to Vote.

Recently, my dream of becoming an American Citizen came true. I encouraged my mom and dad to take the test and they passed.

Because of the freedoms given to me I am able to vote when I become 18 years old, to choose my friends, to think and speak freely, and to pursue my career goals. I value the United States Constitution because of the life it has given me and other immigrants.

Wanda Nichols
West Bertie Elementary School
Lewiston-Woodville, North Carolina

Grade: 8
Teacher: Bobby I. Occena

The U.S. Constitution has survived the test of time. Though it was written 200 years ago, this hallowed document still serves as the basic guide and sentinel of all the laws in the United States of America. It has inspired other countries, old and new, in molding their government and laws based on our Constitution. It has also guided America to be moral and just.

As a young, individualistic, Black citizen, this magnificent document means so much to me. The Constitution and its Bill of Rights have given me a distinct and honorable place in a democratic society. I am a respected human being although I happen to belong to a minority. I can do what I please within limits of the law.

It has granted me rights and freedoms to pursue my human goals and aspirations. Freedom of worship has reinforced and nourished my belief in God and consideration of my fellow men. Freedoms of speech and of the press have given me the tools to speak out in a positive way because I am more informed. These Constitutional rights have made me a true believer in equal justice and equal opportunity.

To me the Constitution is like a beautiful and talented lady. *She* is charming but unyielding to the onslaughts of bigotry. She is rigid but flexible. She changes her mood according to the way our society perceives change. Yet, I am not afraid to face changes because she is there to guard my identity and human-worth.

Michael Rader
Amity Region #5
Junior High School
Bethany, Connecticut

Grade: 8
Teacher: Rita Gedansky

The Constitution is very important to me. It is a protector, like an eagle shielding us with its wings. Under the protection of this great eagle, I am guaranteed many rights. The most important right I have in this wonderful country is the right to practice my religion the way I want to. This right has special meaning to me, since I have close ties with my Soviet Jewish brethren. I spiritually "twinned" my Bar Mitzvah with a Jewish boy in Russia who cannot practice his Judaism. He is forbidden to emigrate to the U.S. or Israel. This twinning has given me a special link to my persecuted brethren. By way of this link, I have learned how lucky I am to live in a land where I am not persecuted. Throughout history, the Jewish people have endured many hardships and much persecution. It is important that I never forget this, and that I never forget that my people are still oppressed in Russia. I remember this each day, and when I do, I think of our Constitution, which has enabled me to live a religious life without fear of persecution.

On a broader scale, the Constitution has special meaning for our country. It is the basis of our democratic government. It is the heart of our freedom. Without this Constitution, one person could dictate to the American people how to live. Americans can *choose* to do right or wrong, to go left or right. People living under communist rule don't choose, they take orders. Those who don't are punished or even killed. We must never forget how lucky we are, and always remember those less fortunate than us.

Maria Elena Ramirez Grade: 8
St. Olaf School Teacher: Susan Mommsen
Bountiful, Utah

To me, the Constitution of the United States means something that is long-lasting. It has lasted for 200 years, and it is still strong. Like a product that works, you stay with it. As with the Constitution it has worked, so it has stayed.

I also think the Constitution means freedom, freedom for everyone. The Bill of Rights states that there is freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and many other freedoms. When the English colonists came to America they were looking for freedom from England and its rule. It took many years to win its freedom but they worked and fought until they got it.

To the people of the United States of America, the Constitution symbolizes a freedom to live their own lives. I think everyone takes for granted the freedom that is given to us. Not until it is taken away, do we realize how important it is to us. We should take the Constitution, and our body of rights, and take them seriously, using them to the best of our ability.

The Constitution is our base of government. Without it there would be no stability, and the country would be having revolutions and coups for many years. It was written by people with brilliant minds and they understood what they wanted and tried their hardest to gain it.

The people of the nation, of our country, should keep that American spirit and show it by giving their talents and ideas to the government and helping the country become a better place to live.

Mary Robbins
McKnight Middle School
Renton, Washington

Grade: 7
Teacher: Nancy Heistuman
Cynthia D. Shearrer

To me the Constitution means many things. Among the most important are freedom of press, speech, and religion.

During the days of the Puritans, the Quakers suffered terrible wrongs because they had no protection for their religious beliefs. It is possible that the ordeal and deaths of my ancestors, Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick, were the principal causes for the establishment of civil and religious rights in the United States Constitution.

This Quaker family of Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick and their children, was fined, beaten, and banished by the Puritans. The parents and their son Josiah were forced to leave their colony by boat with little money and a few articles and landed at Shelter Island on Long Island Sound. There the parents died of starvation and cold. Josiah, on returning, was jailed, whipped, and driven through many towns. Their son Daniel, 22, and daughter Provided, 18, were ordered to be sold into slavery and to be sent to Barbados Island. But the ship's captains refused to take such a young girl, and they were saved. She is probably the only white girl ever ordered sold at auction as a slave in what is now the United States. The tragedy of the Southwick family inspired John Greenleaf Whittier to write his famous poem, "Cassandra Southwick."

Because of the hardships that my ancestors and others like them endured, I am free to attend any church without fear. My ancestors did this for me—and for you. The writers of the Constitution were our fathers of freedom.

Amy Rosen Grade: 8
Edgewood Middle School Teacher: Debbie Mall
Highland Park, Illinois

The Constitution is very special to me and my family. All of my relatives lived in Poland, and they dreamed of America. It was the perfect land. If you worked hard enough in America, you could get what you wanted. In Poland, you could work and work and work some more but still nothing would change.

One day my family had the opportunity to immigrate. They considered Israel and other European countries, but none of them was right. The governments were too shaky.

There would be a government with its laws and someone new would take over with new laws. Usually these were unfair and hard to live by. But America was different. America had the Constitution.

In the United States there were established fair laws that treated everyone as equals. In America, your color or religion didn't matter.

My family dreamed of America. They were going to get there if it took everything they had. They worked hard, but they didn't mind because everything would be good, once they were in America.

The reason our country was so different was because of the Constitution. It gave structure and provided stable, yet flexible laws that the rest of the world was looking for. It allowed you to say what you felt and be who you were. America was the one and only place with all of those freedoms.

Almost all of my family died in World War II. They died with only dreams. But my grandparents and my mother lived, and were able to see their dreams come true. They came to America.

The first thing they saw was Lady Liberty, symbolizing many of the freedoms that were about to become theirs. I'm very lucky they chose America to be their home because now I have the privileges, and the freedoms that the Constitution gives all Americans, including myself and my family.

Corey Rosen
Niu Valley Intermediate School
Honolulu, Hawaii

Grade: 8
Teacher: Helen Sunakoda

Today was a normal day for me. I woke up, went to school, got home and played with my friends, and had a leisurely evening with my family. After dinner I began this essay.

Prior to tonight I had never read the Constitution. As I read, I thought for the first time about all the ways that it affects my life. In the morning when I wake up I can read an uncensored newspaper. Also, before I go to sleep I can watch Johnny Carson making jokes about the President free from fear of being punished for it.

The Constitution also offers me the freedom of religious choice–something too often taken for granted. But the most important thing about the Constitution is that it makes the government work for me, because it is me. By learning the issues, voicing my opinions, and working for candidates, even though I'm too young to vote, I believe I can influence what happens. Also, the Constitution by dividing power between the three branches of government, and between the states and the federal government makes sure that no one person or group obtains too much power.

Unlike other places in the world where freedom is only a dream, the Bill of Rights guarantees specific freedoms for me and all Americans. This is a great gift that we can never take for granted, and that we must take care to protect and preserve for future generations.

Lynndella Tacheene
Tuba City Boarding School
Tuba City, Arizona

Grade: 8
Teacher: Ricardo Mora

The Constitution is one of the main reasons why I'm living my life free from slavery and violence. I'm a Native American Indian, and without the Constitution my tribe would not progress. The Constitution protects our tribal laws. The amendments gave the rights for the Navajos to choose their own religion. If the Indians didn't have the right to their own religion, they would have lost part of their culture. Others don't invade tribes anymore, because the second amendment protects us. No one can take our belongings, our customs, our language, our heritage.

The citizens of the United States have the right to speak what they want. They have the right to assemble anytime, anywhere. The militia is there when we need to defend our country and the citizens of the United States. The people have the right to arm themselves if they're in danger or otherwise.

The part I like best about the Constitution is how it was made. The leaders worked for many hours thinking hard, to make it clear enough for others to know how the government operates. They made the Constitution become a special paper, written and signed by special people, for a special country. It was written by men who saw in the future, just how great and powerful our country would be. The Constitution will be kept and enforced for as long as the United States exists. For as long as life goes on.

The religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.

James Madison

Jonathan Foster Terry
Fort Riley Junior High School
Fort Riley, Kansas
Grade: 8
Teacher: Ruth Schrum

The United States Constitution was the first legal document of its kind. It was a set of rules designed not to benefit the rich and noble at the expense of the poor but to benefit the nation as a whole. Its wise writers realized the mistakes of their many democratic predecessors. They delegated the powers of government to three separate branches, therefore preventing the one thing that had brought down so many earlier democracies, the dictator. In the system set up by the Constitution none of the three branches can ever hold more power than the others. Some may not be in the public or political spotlight as often as the others (as in the case of the Supreme Court) but that is not what is important.

The writers were careful to secure this balance of power, just as they were careful to insure the quality as a whole. The Constitution was written carefully so that no loophole would be overlooked. They set up an amendment system whereby any shortsightedness on their part could be adjusted to conform with the needs of future times. Even so, we have had only 26 amendments, an incredibly few compared to the hundreds found in similar documents from other nations. In fact, many countries do not even have a constitution. What they refer to as their constitution is merely a large group of laws written over a period of many years. The common American person is reassured by the concise format of his own Constitution. He* (she) can see and understand his rights and responsibilities any time he* chooses to. He* knows his rights and therefore cannot be denied them. He* may not be rich, but he* knows he can better that condition, no matter how lowly it may be. That is what the Constitution means to the American people and me. If we work hard, we can be anything we choose to be.

Melissa Tinker
Ernest J. King School
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Grade: 7
Teacher: Arthur C. Seldney

Rules, liberties, privileges, and justice–these are things that nearly every American takes for granted. Every life in the United States revolves around these rights, but where do they come from and what guarantees our rights as United States citizens? The Constitution, now 200 years old, does. It is time for us to step back and discover what the Constitution means to us individually and as a nation.

After the Revolutionary War, America was a weak country governed under the Articles of Confederation. However, our forefathers, with amazing genius, still had hope for the little nation composed of immigrants from all over the world. With this glimmer of hope these brave men created the Constitution of the United States, the longest governing document in the world.

Many Americans believe that the Constitution is imperfect and quite openly express their opinions against it. But wait–without the Constitution and its guaranteed right of freedom of speech, we would be unable to do this and possibly be persecuted for it.

A wide variety of religions is represented in America, brought in from all over the world. What if this were not possible? What if we could not ponder or express our religious beliefs? In many nations you must believe as you are told to believe.

There are many different races in the United States. Though it was not always so, luckily now most Americans accept each other's differences and learn from one another. The United States is not divided into racial or economic classes. We are all given equal rights, thanks to the Constitution.

The Constitution means that a man can rise up from the deepest poverty into the most luxurious wealth. It means that we all have a chance for equality, despite sex, race, religion, or color. The Constitution means that anything is possible–that dreams can come true. After all, the ultimate dream has already come true. That was the dream of a few men, hundreds of years ago–arguing, compromising, awake nights on end . . . creating . . . a nation, our nation, the United States of America–the ultimate dream.

Dang Can Truong
Central Junior High School
Atlantic City, New Jersey

Grade: 8
Teacher: Theresa Marsden

The U.S. Constitution means something sensational to me! I was not born in America. I came here with my family a few years ago from Vietnam. Many people take their freedoms for granted, but I do not. The Constitution gives me many privileges and rights. For instance, it gives me freedom. I have the right to be different. I have the right to look different. I have the right to think differently.

It gives me a voice in running our government. I have the power to choose my government's officials. Imagine! I can pick the President of the United States for I have the right to vote.

In return for all the Constitution has given me, I must work and study hard. I shall always try to do my best in everything! I will always obey the laws and honor this country's customs and traditions. I will respect the flag for it is the symbol of a strong nation and represents my pride in the U.S. Constitution.

Again, I say the U.S. Constitution means something sensational to me. In Vietnam I was treated harshly; I did not have protection against quartering of troops in my home. I did not have freedom of the press and of speech. I had to get the government's permission before I could print a story or write an article, and I had to keep my mouth shut.

The U.S. Constitution has created the best way of life ever known! So join me. Be proud and show pride in this country. Take care of your loved ones, your brothers, sisters, mom, and dad. Show kindness, dignity, and respect to your friends, parents, teachers, and all people. Show respect for yourself by being honest and hardworking. Study hard and try to do your best in everything. Live up to the Constitution.

Sabrina Jane Yazdpour
Valley Stream North
High School
Franklin Square,
New York

Grade: 7
Teacher: Kathy J. Ragno

Every morning when I step outside of my door and take a deep breath, the air I breathe is the clear, sparkling air of a free nation. The freedom of this nation is guaranteed to me and to every American, by the brilliance of our Constitution.

The Constitution is not a dusty and dead paper, but is a living link that bonds every other American who has ever lived.

The genius of the Constitution lies in the fact that even though it is 200 years old, it is still in perfect harmony with modern life today. The Constitution lives, every time an American reads his newspaper, gathers on his front steps with his friends, casts his vote, serves on a jury, or pays his taxes. Even though sometimes we don't realize it, we are carrying the spirit and soul of the Constitution next to our hearts every moment of our lives.

The poorest man in the land sits in his tiny room; the wind may blow and shake his roof; the rains and storms may enter, but without his consent, not even the President, with all his might and power, may enter this poor man's home. The Constitution is alive and belongs to every American. So take a deep breath–that's FREEDOM you're breathing.

In a word, it (the Constitution) makes a man both willing to live *and to* die. *To* live, *because it opens to him fair prospects of great public and private happiness. To* die, *because it ensures peace, order, safety, and prosperity to his children.*

Dr. Benjamin Rush, 1790

Najia Yusufi
Manchester Middle School
Akron, Ohio

Grade: 8
Teacher: Mark Spitler

On the 13th of February 1987, I became a permanent citizen of the United States. I am proud to say that it's an honor living here under this Constitution. I will formally embrace America as my new home. In so choosing, I am now part of a great country, a land of extraordinary natural beauty, a land of strength and pride, a land of God's precious grace and glory. Like my fellow Americans, I will share in the blessings of liberty and freedom that Americans have enjoyed for more than two centuries. With these cherished blessings come privileges, responsibilities, and one of America's greatest gifts—opportunity.

I am a natural born citizen from Afghanistan and under the present Constitution, I cannot one day become the President of the United States, but I have the right to choose my work, to seek any job for which my experience and ability will fit me best. Because of the Constitution, I have the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"!

All of us citizens have certain basic human needs: the need to be free from aggression, domination, or exploitation; the need for love and affection; the need to belong to groups and be helped by others; the need to take responsibility in cooperation with others; and the need for equal opportunities. The Constitution allows us to take part in these needs and more. Therefore the Constitution means a great deal to the U.S. citizens and the United States newest citizen—me! Through these guaranteed rights, under the Constitution, we'll build goodwill for this generation and the generations that follow.

America is lucky . . .

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This book was produced by Information Services, Edwin S. Darrell, Director, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Ann Swift directed the project, with Carson Daly, researcher, and Cynthia Hearn Dorfman, editor. Philip Carr designed the cover.

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